# If You Love Me, Honor Me

The Leaders Need to Return to God’s Love

Malachi 1:6-14

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*Return to God’s Love (Malachi)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

“I was astonished that although I now loved You… I did not persist in enjoyment of my God. Your beauty drew me to You, but soon I was dragged away from You by my own weight and in dismay, I plunged again into the things of this world... as though I had sensed the fragrance

of the fare but was not yet able to eat it.”

**~ St Augustine**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Malachi 1. We are beginning a series in Malachi called “Returning to God’s Love.” I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “The Problem with the Priests.”

**Malachi 1:6-14**, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’

7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts.

9 And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts.

10 Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

12 But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. 13 But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord.

14 Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”

Where they went wrong in seven ways…

1. They lost their reverence, vs. 6
2. They lost their zeal for sacrifice, vs. 6b-8
3. They lost their prayer life, vs. 9
4. They lost their understanding of worship, vs. 10
5. They lost their testimony among the nations, vs. 11-12
6. They lost their passion for worship, vs. 13
7. They lost their blessing from the Lord, vs. 14

This section of Scripture (1:6-14) is directed to the priests of Israel. In verses 1-5 God says “I love you Israel!” They question God’s love, so Malachi ‘turns the tables’ on their complaint. It is not God’s love for Israel which is to be questioned, but Israel’s [love] for God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. The priests lost their **reverence** for God (Mal 1:6).

Do **you** love **me**?

**Malachi 1:6**, “A son honors his **father**, and a servant his **master**. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’”

**Malachi 1:14b**, “For I am a great **King**, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”

What a precious relationship – **father** and son. So tender. So filled with reverence for the tender father. Unlike our earthly Fathers, God the Father is perfect. He perfectly loves. Perfectly provides. Perfectly knows. Perfectly shepherds. He is due honor because He is worthy of honor.

A **master**, employer, owner of a company receives a measure of reverence and respect.

A great **King** or Governor, like the one in Persia. We are to reverence and honor him. As a King, God is also owed our unconditional allegiance. Unlike the leaders of our world, he is perfect. He perfectly rules. He is perfectly wise, perfectly just, perfectly powerful, and perfectly protective. He is due our respect because he is worthy of respect.

**Reverence Definition**

God says, “Where is my reverence?” Reverence is “the loving, sincere and practical recognition of the greatness of God.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Lord is saying to us, ‘Where is my honor?’ Is he asking, ‘Where is my reverence?’

What does the Lord say about our love for him? Is he repeating the words he spoke to the church of Ephesus: ‘… I have this against you, that you have left your first love’? (**Rev. 2:4**).

Is the Lord asking us the same question that he put before his disciples long ago: ‘But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do the things which I say?’ (**Luke 6:46**).[[3]](#footnote-3)

**True Believers Cannot Live Comfortably in Sin**

**C. H. Spurgeon** well articulated a truth we need to be fixed upon, “Remember that if you are a child of God, you will never be happy in sin. You are spoiled for the world, the flesh, and the devil. When you were regenerated there was put into you a vital principle, which can never be content to dwell in the dead world. You will have to come back, if indeed you belong to the family.”

**Pray for Reverence for God**

Let us see our sin, and let it drive us to prayer for humility considering the warning of **Isaiah 66:2**, “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”

Let us not forget the hope, first given to Solomon, not only for the people who later returned from captivity in Ezra’s day (Ezra likely penned 2 Chronicles): **2 Chronicles 7:14**, “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

1. The priests lost their **zeal** for sacrifice (Mal 1:6b-8).

Do **you** love **me**? Have a zeal for sacrifice and generosity of spirit to the Lord! Put God first! Never give God the leftovers!

**Malachi 1:6b-8**, “But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ 7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts.”

Even though God declares “I LOVE YOU,” they don’t believe Him, and their attitude toward worship evidences that. A cold heart loses its reverence. It also loses its desire to be radical in sacrifice.

**Leftovers**

God tells the Israelites they are despising His name by polluting His table. Specifically, the people are bringing their **leftovers**. Instead of offering the **best** of their flocks, they bring the blind, lame, and sick animals to the priests to offer as sacrifices for their sin. God does condemn the Priests for offering the unacceptable sacrifices. They were responsible to protect the purity of worship so as to NOT profane God’s name.

What was God’s basis for accusing them of dishonoring his name? Verse 7 tells us that the priests were offering ‘defiled food’ to God. Verse 8 tells us that they were bringing the blind, the lame and the sick to God.

They were supposed to bring their best to God, and they were bringing their worst. They were offering as sacrifices the very animals that were likely to die very soon. Thus they were not really sacrificing anything at all! They were essentially saying that God was not worthy of their best.

To drive his point home, the Lord tells them to try the same thing with their governor, “Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts” (v. 8)! No political leader of that day would have been pleased with his people paying their taxes with diseased animals. They would not even try to get by with such a thing! But they were doing it with their supreme ruler![[4]](#footnote-4)

If all of life is worship, we must consider what our lives declare about God’s value? Is he valuable enough to deny myself anything this world might have to offer, even my own comfort?

Remember **2 Samuel 24:24**, what David said to Araunah when he wanted to sacrifice to God to stop His wrath against the people: “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.”

**Matthew 10:37-39**, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

* Is the Lord valuable enough for me to give up my money?
* My time?
* My food (1 Cor. 7-*fasting*)?
* Is He valuable enough to give up my reputation?
* Is He valuable enough for me to give up my power?
* Is He valuable enough for me to give up my reputation?
* Is He valuable enough for me to give up my life?

**Philippians 3:7-10**, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as **rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

**Romans 12:1-2**, “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. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

**Galatians 2:20**, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

**CT Studd Quote**

If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." - C.T. Studd.

1. The priests lost their **prayer life** (Mal 1:9).

Do **you** love **me**?

**Malachi 1:9**, “And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts.” [NO!]

Even though God declares “I LOVE YOU,” they don’t believe Him, and their attitude toward worship evidences that. A cold heart loses its reverence. Another casualty is our prayer life.

Their disdain for the name of God resulted in God refusing to answer their prayers! Malachi seems to dare the priests to check this out for themselves. He essentially says, ‘Ask God for something. See if he will be gracious.’ He then solemnly assures them that they cannot ask for God’s favor with their mouths while their hands are engaged in dishonoring him. We do not like to be told that the success of our prayers is tied to the conduct of our lives, but it is a link that the Bible will not let us ignore (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 15:29; 28:9; Isa. 59:1–3).

**Psalm 66:18**, “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

**Isaiah 59:1-3**, “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,

or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;

2 but your iniquities have made a separation

between you and your God,

and your sins have hidden his face from you

so that he does not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood

and your fingers with iniquity;

your lips have spoken lies;

your tongue mutters wickedness.”

Our first response to unanswered prayer, therefore, must not be to accuse God of failing to keep His Word but rather to examine our hearts to see if we are living according to His Word.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**We are Not Perfect but We are Serious**

This doesn’t mean we have to be perfect in order to get our prayers answered. We must clear the channel between God and ourselves if we expect his blessings to flow through. One commentator, John Benton, observes:

God’s answering our prayers does not depend on our being sinless. If this were the case no one would have their prayers answered, for none of us is perfect this side of heaven. However, God’s hearing our prayers does depend on our being serious about the fight against sin in our lives. It is not the presence of sin but the *toleration* of sin which shuts down communication with heaven[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. The priests lost their **understanding** of worship (Mal 1:10).

God says: Do **you** love **Me**? Then worship Me!

**The Worship was Enthusiastic in Nehemiah’s Day**

God’s message through Malachi is that worship matters. It has been 100 years since the scattered Israelites returned home to gather; 100 years since they rebuilt the temple; 100 years since they appointed priests and began to worship and make sacrifices. Nehemiah 12 records the day when the people rededicated the walls of the city and restored the first services in the temple. The priests were assembled, instruments were gathered, and two great choirs sang as they walked along the walls of the city.

“And they [*the men of Israel*] offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far way” (**Neh 12:43**).

In all the excitement, people were eager to serve. Some signed up to manage the storerooms, others to sing on the worship team, a few to administrate the finances, and even a couple to act as security at the gate. “And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron” (**Neh 12:47**). Worship was an important time of great joy, great unity, and great sacrifice for both the priests and the people.

**The People Fell Away from Worshipping God**

Malachi takes place 100 years after Nehemiah, and things are different now. Attitudes have changed. Israel is no longer zealous for worship. In only 100 years, two generations, worship has become heartless and obedience unimportant. Neither the priests nor the people are excited about worship. It has become a routine, a checked box, a joyless duty. Having not experienced the prosperity they expected, the Israelites find themselves disillusioned about their lives and doubtful about God’s promises.

Even though God declares “I LOVE YOU,” they don’t believe Him, and their attitude toward worship evidences that. Anytime men declare, by word or deed, that worship “isn’t worth it”; they in fact declare that God is not worthy to be honored or obeyed.

**Shut the Doors of My Temple!**

God shocks their attention by asking them to shut the church, basically. Stop worshipping me at my Temple! Don’t come anymore. **Malachi 1:10**, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.”

This verse adds yet another catastrophic result of the priests’ irreverence. Here the Lord tells them that their worship is ***worthless*** in his eyes. God calls them to shut the doors of the temple! God says, “**No worship** is better than **unengaged worship**!”

**Hot or Cold!**

We cannot read the Lord’s words here without thinking of the similar message delivered by the Lord Jesus to the church of Laodicea: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth’ (**Rev. 3:15–16**). Lukewarm worship causes God to vomit.

**Worship in Spirit and Truth**

This must not be used as an excuse not to worship. God commands both that we worship him and that we worship him in the right way. And the right way is, of course, that which the Lord Jesus indicated in his conversation with the Samaritan woman: ‘God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24).

“To **worship God in spirit** is to worship him with our ***spirits engaged***. It is to worship with our hearts going out after God…

To **worship God in truth** is to do so ***according to what God Himself has revealed***. It is to worship according to the truth of his Word.” [[7]](#footnote-7)

Worship from the heart and according to the Bible is the kind of worship that pleases God. We are not left to define worship for ourselves. The Lord Jesus has defined it for us.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. The priests lost their **testimony** among the nations (Mal 1:11-12). Do **you** love **me**? Live a life to God’s glory!

**Chief End of Man**

I ask my children almost every day, “What is the chief end of man.” I love to hear our four year old Ava tell me! “To glorify God and to love Him forever.” This is the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

**Giving the Right Opinion of God**

St. Paul says, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” To do all to his glory literally means, “to give the right opinion” of God. God’s people were not giving the right reflection and opinion of God. Yet God says He will get glory.

The people of Israel could not imagine a day like ours today where God gets glory wherever the sun shines! Listen to Malachi’s prophecy:

**Malachi 11-12**, “For from the rising of the sun to its setting **my name will be great among the nations**, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For **my name will be great among the nations**, says the Lord of hosts. 12 But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.”

Twice in this verse the Lord says: ‘My name shall be great.…’ The Lord is absolutely committed to bringing glory to his name!

**Without Genuine Worship, We Hurt Ourselves**

The religious leaders of Malachi’s day were refusing to give God glory, but they were not derailing God’s plan. ***They were only hurting themselves***. God did not need Israel to give him glory.

**God Doesn’t Need Israel – He Can Get Glory from Gentiles**

If Israel would not give him his due, he would receive it from the Gentiles. And he would receive it from them on such a wide scale that it was possible for him to say that he would be receiving glory all the time (‘from the rising of the sun, even to its going down’) and in ‘every place’.

**The Glory of the Gospel**

The fullness of God’s beauty and glory is revealed in the Gospel. God is good. He brings good news. Nothing brings God more glory than the good news of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God has done in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, to provide forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus. The heart of the gospel is Jesus’ death on the cross. There He received the wrath of God in the stead of sinners. Because He received it, those sinners never have to receive it. They are freed from the penalty of sin because Jesus endured it on their behalf.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Imitators of the Lord**

This grand scale testimony is something that the priests of Israel were forfeiting. We need to pray for God’s blessing to make our testimony go beyond the four corners of this building. Paul said the evidence that we have been touched by God’s glory is a changed life. We now have the power to live an example and to imitate the Lord. **2 Cor 3:18** says as we gaze at Christ we are changed into His image from one level of glory to the next.

Paul said a similar thing in **1 Thess 1:6-10**, “You became **imitators** of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an **example** to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but **your faith in God** **has gone forth** **everywhere**, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and **how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God**, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

Is this your testimony? Do you live like this? Is the central motivation of your soul to live a life to God’s glory? Oh, that we would come to Him tonight with this kind of heart for God’s glory to be displayed among the nations!

1. The priests lost their **passion** for worship (Mal 1:12-13).

Do **you** love **Me**? Worship Me with passion! **Malachi 1:12-13**, “But you **profane** it [my worship] when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. 13 But you say, ‘What a **weariness** this is,’ and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord.”

**Wounding the Worship of YHWH**

The word ‘**profane’** comes from a Hebrew word which means ‘to **wound** or stab.” What a word to use in connection with the glorious, precious name of God! Wounding it! Stabbing it! Through our pride, we wound the worship of God. We mangle it! Pride mangles Everything!

**The Danger of Backsliding (St. Augustine)**

Listen to the words of St. Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (North Africa): “I was astonished that although I now loved You… I did not persist in enjoyment of my God. Your beauty drew me to You, but soon I was dragged away from You by my own weight and in dismay, I plunged again into the things of this world... as though I had sensed the fragrance of the fare but was not yet able to eat it.” **~ St Augustine**

**They Were Above Having to Worship God!**

How were the priests profaning God’s name? With their prideful attitudes and action. They were essentially declaring that the ‘table’ (‘altar’) of the Lord was contemptible, that is, something which possessed no appeal or value. They were above it!!

Malachi 1:13 – “You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord.” By bringing stolen, lame and sick animals, they were effectively proclaiming that they put no value at all on the altar of the Lord, that they regarded it as having no meaning.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Wearisome Worship**

The priests were also sinning against the name of the Lord by openly expressing their unhappiness about having to serve. As they went about their duties they were saying, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ To them the service of God was an irksome duty instead of a joyous delight.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Showing Contempt for Worship**

As we go about public worship, do we give the impression that the things of God are exceedingly precious and glorious? Or do we give the impression that we are engaged in an unpleasant obligation that must be taken out of the way as quickly as possible? Do we go about our service to the Lord in such a way that we make it appear to be a very unattractive thing and in such a way that we make the things of the world to be very wonderful? Do we show respect for the preaching of God’s Word? Or do we, by laughing and talking with those around us, show contempt for it?[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. The priests lost their **blessing** from the LORD (Mal 1:14).

Do **you** love **me**? Seek His blessing! **Malachi 1:14**, “Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”

We will not get away with superficial worship. It’s dangerous. To be cursed was no empty threat, therefore, but led to death, whereas the blessing bestowed life (Deut. 30:19). The man who trifled with God would not go unpunished, but would find out that he was *a great King* as well as father and master (verse 6), and that he did not spare those who flouted his majesty.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Conclusion:** Remember, the theme of Malachi is God’s unrelenting love. Let’s pray that we will see God as a great and merciful King to bestow His infinite love, and not a King that brings judgment!

1. Hugenberger, G. P. (1994). Malachi. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 885–886). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ellsworth, R. (2007). *Opening up Malachi* (p. 27). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ellsworth, 28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ellsworth, 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Benton, *Losing Touch*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ellsworth, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 28, p. 251). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)