# If You Love Me, Lead My People

Malachi 2

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*Return to God’s Love (Malachi)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

“O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire Thee with our whole heart; that, so desiring, we may seek, and seeking find Thee; and so finding Thee may love Thee; and in loving Thee, may hate those sins from which Thou hast redeemed us.” **~ Anselm**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Malachi 1. We are continuing in a series in Malachi called “Returning to God’s Love.” I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “If You Love Me, Lead My People.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

This evening we are looking at the book of Malachi. This is the last book of the Old Testament as God gives some final words to His people leading into 400 years of silence and darkness before the birth of Jesus Christ. This book sets up as a series of challenging conversations between God and His people who have return from exile to Jerusalem and Israel. God declares something about His character – He says, “I have loved you!” But the people respond with the accusatory question: “but How have you loved us?”

**God’s Zeros in on Leadership**

God’s answer is I have loved you, but you haven’t loved me. And God zeros in on the priests. He says in **Malachi 2:1**, “And now, O priests, this **command** is for you.” He tells them “Listen to me and… honor my name.”

God basically says, “You want to see love return to the people of God – it’s up to the leaders to repent.” Everything stands and falls on leadership.

**Alistair Begg Quote**

Scottish preacher Alistair Begg said it this way, “The Church of Jesus Christ does not progress beyond the spiritual progress of its leaders.”

**God’s Command: Obedience**

God’s command to the priests is simply: obedience. As New Covenant believers, we might say, your knowledge means nothing unless you “walk in the Spirit.” Let God rule you. Be a living sacrifice. Surrender all. Hold nothing back. The priests were holding on to the false comfort of their lives.

**Corrie Ten Boom Quote**

I like how Corrie Ten Boom put it: “Don’t bother to give God instructions, just report for duty.” Here the priest of Israel were questioning God instead of obeying Him.

**Tozer Quote**

I think A. W. Tozer said it well: “Have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late - and how little revival has resulted? I believe the problem is that we have been trying to substitute praying for obeying, and it simply will not work.”

“Glorify Me by listening and obeying Me,” God says.

Everything stands and falls on leadership. This is why the Lord begins by addressing the priests.

**How the Priests of Malachi Relate to Us**

**Christ as the Perfect Priest**

Christ is the Perfect and Eternal Priest. He’s our perfect High Priest. According to John Piper, “Christ is now the one and only priest between us and God. The reason for this is that his sacrifice was final and his life is indestructible (cf. Heb. 7:16).”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Hebrews 9:11–12**, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest … 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

**The Whole Church as a Holy Priesthood**

“Instead, Peter calls the whole church a “holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5) and a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9); and John says that Christ made the whole church a kingdom, priests to his God and Father (Revelation 1:6). This means that Christ has opened the way for all of us to come directly to God through him. We do not need any human mediator. We can walk with Christ—our high priest—right into the Holiest Place where God dwells and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).”[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The Duties of Priests in the NT**

“So there is no official priesthood in the New Testament church. No church leaders are called priests because of their office in the church. But this raises the question: Were there other duties that priests had in the Old Testament besides offering sacrifices for the sake of the people—duties that may indeed be continued in the New Testament?

The answer is a clear yes. Notice **Malachi 2:7**, “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for **he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts**.”

In other words the priests were teachers. This part of their ministry is continued in the church of the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 says that Christ gave to the church some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. First Timothy says that there are to be overseers who are able in teaching (3:2), and that some elders in the church are to labor in preaching and teaching (5:17; cf. Titus 1:9).

**This Message is for You**

So this part of the priests' duties in Israel is continued in the elders of the New Testament church—they are responsible to teach and guide the church. But they are never called “priests”…

Yet Piper concludes that these duties of the priests (teaching and instructing of God’s Word) is applicable to all of us and specifically to the elders of Christ’s church. So this message is for us anyone who is called to instruct God’s people in the New Testament church.

It is specifically addressed to anyone who would be a leader in God’s church. We need to see the scope

**Outline and Structure of Malachi 2**

The outline of the chapter is a chiastic arrangement of

* 1-3, rebuke / judgement
* 4-7, prototype of true minister
* 8-9, rebuke / judgement

**Who are the Priests?**

**Malachi 2:1**, “And now, O priests, this **command** is for you.” Who exactly are the priests? So the priests are from the tribe of Levi and directly descended from Aaron. While any Levite could help serve in the Temple, the priests were those who carried out two important duties:

* The priests received and prepared the sacrifices from the people in the Temple
* The priests instructed the people on the Sabbath Day and other occasions.

**God is Severely Offended with the Priests**

God is severely offended at the priests. He curses them and removes His blessing upon them. God, the Great King, is not honored by their half/no hearted actions and will not accept their offerings and actually curses those who pledge/claim to worship fully but act as hypocrites and give sick animals. While the priest are taking these worthless offerings rather than instruct or rebuke the people for their faithlessness they complain and “snort” back to God that their role as priest/teacher is making them weary because they are to live off the offerings and tithes of these faithless people. In our section today God shifts the conversation form the people to the priests/leaders who are responsible for not upholding the purity of worship.

1. Be careful of the **pitfalls** for leaders (Mal 2:1-3, 8-9).
2. **A Failure to Walk with God and Hear His voice (vs. 1-2)**

**Malachi 2:1-2**, “And now, O priests, this **command** is for you. 2 If you will not listen… then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.”

“If you will not listen…” (vs 2). That’s the point they were not listening. We all have this danger as well. We may be so familiar with the science of parsing Scripture, that we miss the heart of Scripture: to know the Author!

**You Can’t Herald What you Don’t Hear**

The last line of verse 7 says the minister of the Word is "the messenger of the Lord of hosts." There is a difference between a lecture on the meaning of ancient texts and a message from the Lord of hosts. God has appointed preachers in the church not simply to lead discussions, not simply to explain problems, not simply analyze texts, but to herald a message to his people. And you can't herald what you don't hear.

One laymen from First Baptist Church of Dallas, where W A Criswell was the pastor said, “"Pastor, we know what the editorialists say, and we know what the commentators say, and we know what the economists and politicians say. What we want to know from you is, DOES GOD HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY?!”

**What a curse!**

What a curse it is to know the Scripture but not be able to hear from God! There is no greater curse! That’s like having an apple orchard, and not being able to eat apples! We need to experience the voice of God in our lives!

1. **A Failure Living for the Glory of God (vs. 2b)**

**Malachi 2:2b**, “if you will not **take it to heart to give honor to my name**, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings…”

Note very carefully the wording here. The issue is not merely whether the glory of God is the explicit unifying theme of the minister's doctrine and preaching, but whether there lies on his heart a burden to see God glorified.

**John Piper Quote**

Listen to John Piper on this theme: “The congregation must ask, Is the glory of God not only a part of the Pastor’s theology but also the passion of his soul? Does the glory of God come before the approval and praise of his people? Does it come before professional advancement? Does it come before financial reward and material comfort? Does he come back to it again and again, like the needle of a compass toward the magnet of truth, or like a weather vane in a heavenward wind? Does it come out in private as well as in public, in praying as well as preaching, in playing as well as studying?”

This is the root of the matter. It is the essence of ministerial failure and its opposite (we will see in verse 5) is the essence of ministerial success.

**Are we Man-Centered or God-Centered?**

We could ask this question in a number of ways: Is your life and the life of the pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders man-centered or God-centered?

Man-centered ministries are cursed by God. That’s the point. Are you living out our Vision Statement for our church?

“Living Hope Bible Church exists to glorify God by bringing people to Jesus and membership in His family, helping them to grow and change in Christlike maturity, and equipping them for service to God in the local church and in mission to the world.”

So there’s a failure of walking with God, a failure of living for His glory, and thirdly…

1. **A Failure to Shepherd the People of God (vs. 8).**

**Malachi 2:8**, “But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts.”

The priests were not living out the Word of God and giving an example for the people.

**C. S. Lewis** said, “Whatever “call” a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.”

**1 Peter 1:1-6** instructs us as to how elders are to shepherd the flock. “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but **being examples to the flock**. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you…”

**Pastoral Visitation**

The elders of the church are to be involved in the lives of the people. I want to read you some notes from this past week’s pastoral staff meeting.

A goal for 2017 is pastoral visits to each of the 86 households at Living Hope Bible Church.

**What is Pastoral Visitation?** It’s a meeting between a pastor and a church member (and their family) with goal of determining the spiritual state of everyone in the home and to help them in their walk with Christ through encouragement, edification, exhortation, or correction. We will also come with teaching helps such as a Bible catechism, book recommendations (parenting & marriage, spiritual disciplines, etc.)

**Peter’s Visitation from the Transfigured Christ**

The Pastor is to succeed in His walk with God. The Pastor must be a “a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1). Peter was making an allusion to the powerful experience he had with the Lord when Christ for just a moment peeled back the robe of His humanity, and the Shekinah glory of His blinding divine presence was revealed. Peter was saying, “You know that one day we will see Christ in all His glory? Well, I as an elder have experienced it already.”

The pastor is one who must partake of the glory of Christ! He must SUCCEED in his personal walk with God.

• Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24)

• Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9)

• Any man that wants to lead God’s church must succeed in his own walk with God!!

So the leaders of Malachi’s day failed to walk with God, failed to live for God’s glory, they also failed to shepherd God’s people. And then… there was…

1. **A Failure to Teach the Whole Word of God** without Partiality or Fear of the People (vs. 9).

**Malachi 2:8b-9**, “… You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, 9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show **partiality** in your instruction.”

What does this mean? It means that the priests were treating the Word of God the same way they were treating the sacrifices of God. You give God the sacrifices that will leave you with the most money. And you give the people the teaching that will bring in the most money.

You play to your audience. You say what Daddy Warbucks wants to hear. You step on no toes. You say, "Peace! Peace!" when there is no peace. Or to put it the way Micah 3:11 puts it, "The heads of Jerusalem give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money." When the glory of God no longer satisfies the heart of a preacher, then he will seek his satisfaction elsewhere. And I don't mean by leaving his pulpit; but just by using the Word of God to get gain.

1. **They caused many to stumble** (vs. 8).

**Malachi 2:8b**, “… You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts…”

Are the sins of teachers and leaders more grievous than the sins of others? Yes, they are. Not necessarily because the sin in and of itself is worse, but because its evil is compounded by the weight of public responsibility that should have restrained it. It is more grievous for the priests to sin than for the people to sin, because when the priests sin, they cause many to stumble.

“To whom much is given, much will be required” (**Luke 12:48**).

David Neff wrote in an article in Christianity Today: “The leader who philanders has broken a trust placed in him by a wide community—trust in his vision, reliability, wisdom, and veracity. And the essence of leadership is that trust. So a leader who violates trust in a fundamental and public manner is ipso facto no longer a leader.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Be careful of the **cost** for failed leadership (Mal 2:2-3,9).
2. Loss of **Favor with God**. “I will send a curse upon you” (vs. 2) Cursing and hatred convey rejection. “Many are called but few are chosen.” This is a revelation that the leaders and believers in name only. It’s like our Lord says in Mt 7:21-23

The result of unrepentance (signified by boredom and weariness) is a destructive curse (Mal. 2:2), probably having in mind those curses promised for those guilty of breach of covenant in Deuteronomy 28:15–68.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Loss of **Blessing / Protection**. “I will curse your blessings” (vs. 2) The Word /ministry of life will instead kill.
2. Loss of **Prosperity**. “I will rebuke your offspring” (vs. 3a). This likely refers to children and crops. He will hold them back from fertility and prosperity.
3. Loss of **Reputation**. “I will… spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings” (vs. 3b). Their ministry as as worthless as the dung of their sacrifices. The interpretation and application is in verse 9, “I make you despised and abased before all the people.” God will expose them as the frauds they are.
4. Be careful to seek the **traits** of godly leaders (Mal 2:4-7).

Here we find the prototype of true minister. This prototype is so sacred that when the people of Israel violated this prototype (with Aaron leading them) Exo 32, the Lord commanded Moses to execute 3000 leaders who were worshipping the Egyptian bull god.

Aaron made excuses, Exodus 32:24 (NLT), Aaron said to Moses: “I told them, ‘Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off.’ When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!”

**Malachi 2:4-7**, “So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. 6 True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. 7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for **he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts**.”

**FIVE TRAITS OF A GODLY MINISTER**

1. **CHARACTER/CHRIST**. **Worshipful Devotion** to/ Relationship with God.

A true minister has a right relationship with God. **Malachi 2:4-5**, “So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name…”

“O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire Thee with our whole heart; that, so desiring, we may seek, and seeking find Thee; and so finding Thee may love Thee; and in loving Thee, may hate those sins from which Thou hast redeemed us.” **~ Anselm**

Number one, character. It says of Levi, and I’m just pulling from Malachi 2:5–7: “He feared me,” God says, “and he stood in awe of my name.” All right, Levi’s issue was, “What does this say about the Lord? How I live my life says something about the Lord.” We’d say he lived coram Deo , or “in the face of God.” Malachi is a man of character as well. He fears God, and he loves people. They can’t look at him and say, “You don’t know the LORD. You don’t walk with the Lord. You’re no better than us.” No, no, they can’t throw any of that at Malachi because he wasn’t a perfect man, but he was a man of character.

Matthew 7:21-23 says that many who claim to be leaders are actually false converts.

1. **CLARITY**. **Faithful Instruction of the Word**. The minister should have a personal commitment by the ministry of God’s Word. **Malachi 2:6a**, “True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips.”

The lips of the messenger is the public reservoir for the church. We are not merely to insist on right doctrine, but upon changed lives.

OK, there’s nothing worse than someone who opens the book and fog comes out. It’s like, “I don’t know where we’re going. I can’t see what we’re talking about. The guy opened the book and fog came out.” Clarity. I try to be clear, and not everybody likes that.

OK, so let me make it clear: There’s one God. He made you. You sinned against him. He loves you, so he came as Jesus Christ to save you. Jesus lived without sin, died on the cross in your place for your sins. Three days later, rose from death. He’s ascended, seated in heaven right now, coming again to judge the living and the dead.

The bottom line is, you’ve got two options: You close your ears, you harden your heart, you live in your sin, you stand before him, and you spend forever in the conscious, eternal torments of hell. Or you open your ears, you soften your heart, you confess your sins, you receive him as Lord and Savior, you close your eyes in death, you awaken to see him face-to-face and to be with him forever in heaven. Clear.

For me, I never want to back away from clarity. I always get frustrated watching a media interview, and the interviewer will be like, “All right, millions are watching. Is Jesus God?” They’re like, “Well, there’s various perspectives, and critics believe, and the ancient hieroglyphics—” And I’m like, “Say yes!” I’m just slamming the TV, “Say yes! Come on!” “Well, what will people think of me?” That you were clear.

1. **CONSISTENCY**. **Growing in Godliness with his Daily Living**. The minister should be marked by godly character and progress in his spiritual life, **Malachi 2:6**b, “He walked with me in peace and uprightness.”

Success is not the measure. Success is that we teach the whole message of God. We need to have godly character and submissive obedience.

It says of Levi, quote, “He walked with me in peace and righteousness.” When the Bible uses the language of “walk,” this is a lifestyle, walking with God. It’s not like, “Well, he walked with me one season, and then he walked with his girlfriend when his wife wasn’t looking, and then he walked over to the church and embezzled some money, and then walked away from the ministry because he just didn’t feel like it, and then walked back in and asked for his job.” It’s like, that’s not a good walk. “Walked with me.”

One commentator, Eugene Peterson, calls this “long obedience in the same direction.” All right, a true teacher of God’s Word can’t have a reverse gear. They’re like, “I love Jesus, and now I don’t, and I’m walking with Jesus, and now I’m not.” Like, you’ve got to keep going forward.

Some of you get enamored by what is new and you get bored with what is eternal. The key is to be consistent over time. Keep meditating. Keep studying. Keep persevering. Keep your eyes on Christ! I’ve had people come up and say, “Pastor Matt, what you told us today—we already knew that.” Well, maybe you needed to hear it again—that’s why sometimes the Bible says things more than once—or maybe somebody just showed up and they never heard it. Consistency.

1. **COURAGE/COMPASSION**. **Speaking up for Biblical Convictions**. The minister should be marked by godly convictions and compassion for others, **Malachi 2:6c**, “and he turned many from iniquity [lawlessness].”

We have to be able to speak up for biblical convictions. It says, “Levi turned many from iniquity.” This takes courage. What this means is that most doctrinal problems are actually moral or ethical problems, historically, even in our own day.

What it is is people want to have some sort of behavior that God says no to, and all of a sudden they will couch it as theological problems.

You see it in our day of post-modern logic, where people are happy to believe contradictory things. We have to stand up and cry out from the rooftops the truth and be counter cultural.

You might say, “That’s mean.” No that’s compassionate. If there is a disease going around and I say, “You have the disease!” – that’s not rude. That’s not mean. That’s compassionate – especially if I have the cure and I’m willing to administer it.

1. **CONVERSIONS**. **Transformation of Lives All Around**. The true minister will have a godly influence upon those under his call, **Malachi 2:7**, “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for **he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts**.”

The fruit is that many people are saved. The phrase of verse 7: “people should seek instruction from his mouth.” You've seen the contrast all the way along, haven't you, between the success portrayed in verses 5–7 and the failures of the priests in Malachi's day.

This last contrast may be the clearest of all. "He turned many from iniquity" is just the opposite of the second phrase in verse 8: "You have caused many to stumble by your instruction." The ministry can destroy and the ministry can save.

When your ministry is rooted in the glory of God and your trunk is strong with the Word of God and your branches display the righteousness of God, then the fruit of your life is going to be the salvation of God for the sake of sinners.

**Conclusion**

Would you commit yourself to pray everyday with me that the glory of God and the Word of God and the righteousness of God would so fill this church that people would turn away from sin, and receive the *salvation of Jesus Christ* right here in this room and all over the Chicagoland area?

1. I am indebted to the materials of John Piper and Mark Driscoll for some insights and structure of this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Piper. Sermon, “The Curse of Priestly Failure” from Malachi 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David Neff. Christianity Today. Nov. 20, 1987, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Baker, D. W. (2006). *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi* (p. 241). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)