



### *The Same Priesthood Now as Then*

*“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. “So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. (Malachi 2:7-9)*

*The New Testament explains that the hereditary priesthood of the Old Covenant has been replaced by every participant in the New Covenant. (1 Pe. 2:5; 9) And so I cannot help but wonder that just as Israel so often serves as a reminder to the church in general of the nature of its relationship to Christ, so the Levitical priesthood might provide examples of right and wrong personal service to Christ. In this regard the book of Malachi can either be quite enlightening or particularly disturbing. The last book of the Old Testament sets the tone for the spiritual environment leading up to the first arrival of the Messiah and serves as an example of what it will be like leading up to His second and final arrival. One of the most visible problems is that spiritual leadership among God’s people became so corrupt that God begins to reject them so that they lose all public credibility with **everyone** – the saved and unsaved alike.*

It does not take much reading of the Gospels to glean the fact that all but a precious few of the religious leaders at the time of Jesus’ first

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arrival had lost credibility with the people in general. Their problem was rooted in the same problem that has always plagued God's people when apostasy and deception govern leadership: no longer living according to God's Word they therefore no longer properly teach according to God's Word. It becomes a business, an opportunity for greed. Or as Malachi puts it, *"You are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction"*.

This is why when Jesus began preaching the Sermon on the Mount it absolutely shocked the people of the day. Jesus begins by repeatedly stating, "You have heard it said" to refer to the mis-teachings of their leaders and follows it up with, "But I say to you" to bring back the plain and simple meaning of God's Word which had become so obscured through misapplication. One of the biggest problems at the time of Christ's first arrival was that those who were supposed to be teaching and upholding His Word had either abandoned it outright (like the Sadducees) or twisted into something unrecognizable or different altogether (like the Scribes and Pharisees). And here, in the shadow of His imminent return, the exact same situation exists today.

Praise God that we can still occasionally find those still fervently holding fast to His Word such as Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, but such men are getting harder and harder to find. And they are certainly **NOT** the personalities dominating the covers of the books at your local so-called "Christian" bookstore or the faces representing Christianity in the secular media or ever asked to appear on *Larry King Live*. Brian McLaren, Joel Osteen, Rick Warren and a host of names all too familiar to you have built empires and usurped the face of Christianity by forsaking and replacing God's Word with something else in its place, usually adapting traditional Christian terms to hide their true agenda. What Malachi would say to what passes for the leadership of God's people today is the same as in his day – *"you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant"*.

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And thanks to the power of its own media outlets, the general population of the unsaved clearly recognize that Christian leadership is at the least flaky and indisputably hypocritical. One of the most irrefutable proofs that the church is steeped in spiritual deception is that its adherents cannot see what non-believers so clearly see because of the likes of TBN and the repeated Internet broadcasting of nonsense such as that which took place in Lakeland: that it is all money-driven hype and nothing remotely biblical.

But thanks to 21<sup>st</sup> Century visibility, it is not just that Christian leadership is now visibly and publicly acknowledged across the board in the same light today as it was during Malachi's day, but the general state of "church-goers" as well. Those who are supposed to be God's people are living exactly like the people of Malachi's time, a reflection of their leaders. What we have at this present hour is a large group of people who will raise their hand and state with their lips that they are Christian, but whose behavior betrays that just like their leaders they have rejected following God's Word and ways.

The first problem with the people of Malachi's time is that they committed idolatry of the worst kind. They didn't simply leave Judaism and go to someone else's temple and enroll in another religion, they brought all the false practices of those false religions into the very house of God and continued to call it "Judaism" and held to the pretense that they were still serving and worshiping the One True God.

*"Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has **profaned the sanctuary of the LORD** which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god.'" (Malachi 2:11)*

Note how this is characterized as their having "*married the daughter of a foreign god*". **Spiritual** unfaithfulness is repeatedly equated throughout Scripture with **marital** unfaithfulness. They are not longer the bride of Christ, so to speak, but of someone else.

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But this dovetails precisely into their second problem. Their spiritual unfaithfulness is reflected visibly in their relationships, most notably in their prolific embrace of divorce.

*"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant...**For I hate divorce...**" (Malachi 2:13-14, 16)*

The biblical principle is the same for all relationships. If you cannot love others biblically, you will not be capable of loving God. If you cannot be faithful in your earthly relationships, you will be incapable of faithfulness in the heavenly ones. Why is divorce so commonplace among those claiming the label "Christian" today? Because spiritual unfaithfulness has become normative. No longer going out and being "salt" and "light" to the world (Mt. 5:13-16) so as to be agents of spiritual change, the majority have brought the world **into** the church to reflect everything the world holds dear and valuable. And it calls all these things "Christian".

The third problem is that the people in the time leading up to Christ's arrival were robbing God.

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "How have we robbed You?" **In tithes and offerings.**" (Malachi 3:8)*

Yes, America is still supplying more dollars to missions than anyone else, but are we bringing in "the whole tithe"? The axiom which nearly any pastor or church accountant quotes these days is that less than 15% of a given congregation's members provide more than 85% of the finances. The problem is probably more acute where the modern church is concerned because whereas the Old Testament standard was 10%, the New Testament is "as much as you're able to give", a standard which would probably exceed 10% given today's lifestyle.

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But like the first two problems, this third problem dovetails effectively into the fourth.

*“Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the LORD. ‘Yet you say, “What have we spoken against You?” You have said, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.”’” (Malachi 3:13-15)*

They actually began to doubt God’s character. It is no mystery why they began to forsake God’s Word because they no longer believed there was any tangible benefit for keeping His Word. Their earthly greed was simply a reflection of their spiritual greed and corruption. Seeking only that which satisfies self, their abandonment of God’s Word turns things inside out.

- They “*call the arrogant blessed*”, meaning that all the worst spiritual characters are held up with the highest regard.
- They “*are the doers of wickedness built up*” meaning that hypocrisy and false religious practices become institutionalized to the point of not just being visible but venerated.
- And finally “*they also test God and escape*”. Having no regard for eternal consequences, they do not believe there are any consequences for their lifestyle, a lifestyle of forsaking God’s Word and ways for self at every level.

How remarkably close are the parallels between God’s people of that time and now.

Having rejected His Word so many are instead embracing “Emergent” churches, or “Purpose Driven” churches, or seeking to reconcile with the heretical by joining with the Catholic church or Mormons or the latest Eastern religious craze. The number of things which have been

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brought into the church from outside religions, particularly New Age and mysticism, and called "Christian" is astounding. The first problem of Malachi's day is the first problem of this present age. It is no longer exclusively the Bride of Christ because she is bringing in another and attributing to him everything originally designated to God alone.

That spiritual unfaithfulness, just like then, is no better reflected than in the current embrace not just of divorce, but the corruption of nearly every kind of personal relationship. The current church has not only embraced the wholesale adoption of divorce as normative, but look at the general attitude towards premarital sex, promiscuity, homosexuality, and on down the line. It is no wonder the largest, disconnected age group from the church is the under 30 crowd. How can they know what spiritual faithfulness means when all they have ever seen is marital unfaithfulness? Doing what pleases the self is the only absolute they have been provided.

And the material greed of Malachi's time in parallel with their spiritual selfishness is a chief characteristic of those claiming to be God's people today. The overwhelming emphasis is on what makes "me" feel good now and every worldly mechanism to this end has been adapted for use and implemented within church walls proper. A mere 30 years ago a church building looked different, a church interior looked different, and the people in attendance were known to be different. Can you tell the difference today between the modern incarnation of "church" and a movie or concert audience?

Just as it was in the days of Malachi, in the days leading up to Christ's first arrival, so it is exactly the same in the days leading up to Christ's second arrival. This is actually why I believe the hour of Christ's return is so close, because of the deepening apostasy and deception ***within*** the church. We are not talking about the spiritual condition of the unsaved, but those actively attending and participating in things most closely associated with the saved. When Christ was here dealing with

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this the first time, He said this is exactly how it would be in the shadow of His return.

*“At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. **Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.** But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”*  
(Matthew 24:10-13)

It is interesting to note that God’s name “*LORD*” is used 50 times in the short, four chapter book of Malachi, but that 25 of those times it is stated as “*LORD of hosts*”. This is an interesting designation of Christ at the head of God’s heavenly armies, a picture we’re all familiar with when it comes to visualizing His final return to set all things right and fulfill God’s every Word. But just as it was in the time leading up to Christ’s first arrival, so it is now. There are fewer and fewer who are truly ready to meet the “*LORD of hosts*” as He will truly come. It will be too late should one find their self on the wrong side of those hosts, in front and in their path rather than in support and among the ranks.

In His Love,

[Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org](mailto:Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org)