

LEADING JUSTLY

Lesson Scripture: Malachi 2-3

Focus Scripture: Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6

Key Verse: If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you. Malachi 2:2 (NRSV)

MALACHI 2:1-9; 3:5-6 (NRSV)

Malachi 2:1-9

- 1 And now, O priests, this command is for you.
- 2 If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.
- 3 I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence.
- 4 Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts.
- 5 My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and 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 integrity 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.
- 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,
- 9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

MALACHI 2:1-9; 3:5-6 (KJV)

Malachi 2:1-9

- 1 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.
- 2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.
- 3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.
- 4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.
- 5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.
- 6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.
- 7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.
- 8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.
- 9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

3:5-6

5 Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

6 For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

3:5-6

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

VOCABULARY

- **Immutable** – Does not change.

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson we saw how God filed charges against the rich ruling class people and the prophets. In this lesson, we see the same case being filed against the priests. To grasp the heart of this lesson, and see its implications in life today, we must understand the role of the priests in Malachi's society. An open hint is in verse 7. In normal day-to-day life, the people went to the priests for counseling and instructions in godly living. The priests were the source of knowledge for matters of worship and interpersonal relationships. And, they administered the sacrifices. We know that the sacrifices were a major part of



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the people's worship relations with God. In short, the priest performed the role of God's communication director for the people. The priests spoke for God. Both God and the people expected them to take these duties seriously. This meant living lives of faithfulness, honesty, and integrity.

In Malachi's day it was obvious that priests had fallen away from the high standard set by Levi (the father of the priesthood). Rather than lead people to healthy relations with God, the priests were turning people off from God. The people were turning their backs on God and the priests joined them. It is always a sad day when the people we look to for strong and godly leadership fall into ungodliness themselves. As we see too many times in our society, the blind can lead the blind to destruction. This lesson has painful modern-day parallels.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Once again, we see a courtroom presentation in Malachi's writings. God put the priests and people on trial for their sins against God. And what were the charges? First, the people had showed disrespect for God's name, and refused to honor God as they were instructed. Second, they offered low-grade sacrifices. They knew that when they made a sacrifice it should be from their best. Rather than do this faithfully, they offered God their rejects: animals that were stolen, crippled, and/or diseased. Third, they disrespected the altar and the consecrated places of worship. We will say more on this in the other sections. Fourth, they disrespected their marriage vows. This meant they were guilty of infidelity and casual divorce. This forced God to declare God's hatred for divorce. Fifth, they robbed God of the stipulated tithes and offerings. Note that tithes and offerings were binding obligations in that society.

To support the charges, Malachi, as God's attorney, compared the attitudes and behaviors of the priests with those of Levi, the father of the priesthood.

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In contrast, you would recall that Levi served God faithfully. He honored God, gave godly instructions to the people, and lived a life of integrity. Also, Levi was faithful and upright in administering the sacrifices. Therefore, he turned many people to God. The priests of Malachi's day were failing on each of these.

The reference to Levi was probably also for another purpose. It should have prompted the priests to recall how God dealt in the past with unfaithful priests (e.g. Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10). Since God is immutable (does not change), it was no surprise that the Lord promised to punish the corrupt priests of Malachi's day, just as he had done before. Yet, in God's ever-flowing mercy, God opened the door to repentance. God's call of, "Return to me, and I will return to you" (3:7) still stands for all who would accept it.

SANKOFA

Today, priests and pastors do not administer sacrifices as was done in Malachi's day. Apart from that, our expectations of them are similar to what was demanded of early church leaders. As it was then, the clergy's conduct is

of crucial importance. God still expects priests to exhibit good character. It is on this quality that the world is judging priests and pastors. As it was in Malachi's day, so it seems to be today. From both within and without the church community we hear horror reports of clergy misconduct. Some of the reports are chilling. In a published report, Archbishop Charles Palmer-Buckle of Accra, Ghana addressed the issue. Indeed, the mere headline of the article is telling. It read, "Ghanaian Archbishop Says Church Has Failed Africa." (See <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/ghanaian-archbishop-says-church-has-failed-africa> - October 14, 2009.) Archbishop Palmer-Buckler was not on the fringes of the Catholic Church with an axe to grind. He was, as the reporter put it, "...widely considered to be among the heavyweights of his generation in the African hierarchy (of the Catholic Church)."

So what did the archbishop say? In summary his view was "...practicing Catholics are often as guilty of corruption and violence as everybody else, he says simply, 'We have failed.'" As you

would expect, such a report from within the church admitting shortcomings of the church got heavy media coverage. It was widely circulated. When it comes to abuses by clergy, we have seen improvements. Still, there is a lot of work to be done.

You can see further details at the link above.

CASE STUDY

So we do not appear to be focusing unfairly on the Catholic Church, we also looked at the issue of clergy abuse within the AME Church. To get an appreciation, consider an article published in the AME's *The Christian Recorder* online site. The article appears under the name of the editor, Mr. John Thomas III, with the date, October 30,

2017. It has the title, "#MeToo in God's House: Reflecting on Sexual Harassment and Assault in the AME Church." Here is the third paragraph of that article.

"Since the mid-1990s, the Connectional AME Church has openly addressed issues of sexual harassment and assault in our churches. This perspective, however, has been from



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a legal perspective stemming from several costly lawsuit judgments. A clear sexual misconduct policy and procedure is now codified in *The AME Book of Doctrine and Discipline*. While the Church may be legally covered, the culture that aids and abets sexual harassment and assault continues to be pervasive and widespread. Sadly, yet unsurprisingly, the #MeToo hashtag and stories proliferated on the pages of AME clergy and laywomen. I also thought about my friends who were impacted (sic) by sexual harassment and assault who were unable to speak out.”

What did it say? The problem of clergy misconduct is a problem in the AME Church as well. And if you follow church news sites, you will see it is a problem in all major church denominations. Some law firms now have departments that specialize in cases involving abuse by the clergy. Millions, if not billions, of dollars are being paid out in judgments and settlements. It is a sad picture. In the **Introduction** we mentioned that one of Malachi's charges against the priests, was their disrespect for the altars and consecrated places

of worship. Unfortunately, this charge stands today. Much of the abuse, which is coming to light, occurred where? Yes, that is true: in the sacred spaces of the church. Dear Lord, have mercy on us!

LIFE APPLICATION

This question of abuse by the clergy is a thorny matter. It calls on us to examine many related issues. One of these is how to approach accusations of such abuse.

Each believer must consider his or her own stance. When you hear an accusation of abuse what do you do? Do you automatically believe the alleged victim and condemn the alleged culprit? Alternatively, do you dismiss the accuser and sympathize with the person who is accused? There is a third position. That is, to listen to the accusations, demand an inquiry, and make a decision based on the available evidence. Which of the three positions do you take?

In considering this, think about the pain each party will suffer. If the accusation proves to be true, and we do not give comfort to the accuser, we increase the pain that person suffers. The reverse is also true. If the accusation turns out to be a hoax, and we immediately vilify



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the accused person, we could ruin the life of an innocent person. Think about your position, so that when these issues arise you can take a principled stance. You will also want to make this a matter of prayer and meditation, and be open to call for your church to have a clear policy on these matters. Too many churches scramble to come up with a policy after the fact.

Further consider this fact: respect is given where respect is demanded. As believers we cannot demand that the public respect our places of worship, when we treat our sanctuaries with little or no respect. We must be part of the movement to make our sanctuaries sacred places of worship. Hence, the activities which we allow in the sanctuaries must be restricted and monitored. When people come to our sanctuaries they should feel a sense of safety and serenity. In the dedicated holy spaces, people should be inspired to pray and seek the Lord. Consider what you can do to make or keep your church sanctuary a consecrated place of worship. If we respect our sanctuaries, others will be

inclined to follow our example.

Some observers believe that based on the sad tales of clergy abuse we see, oversight procedures should be set up in all congregations. Do you agree? The thinking is that such safeguards protect both the congregation and the clergy. For example, all church expenditures must be authorized by persons other than the clergy. This means the priest

or pastor cannot sign checks alone. Some congregations insist that pastors do not conduct counseling sessions alone either. Maybe you want to have these are matters discussed in your church if they are not already addressed.

In these matters there are no hard and fast rules. As believers, we must be ready to

do our part to minimize the incidents of clergy abuse in our churches. This is not optional. God demands it. Always keep in mind that each case of clergy abuse weakens the overall image of the church of Jesus Christ. And, as in Malachi's time, it will be in our time. God will judge abuse and injustice. One final word! Although we have focused on clergy, the comments apply with equal force to all persons in

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leadership in the church.

QUESTIONS

1. In your own opinion, is the level of sexual abuse in the church greater today than in former generations? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Why is God using people outside the church (lawyers, journalists, and social groups) to expose these incidents of abuse among Christian leaders?

3. What can church members do to ensure these incidences of abuse in the church are reduced or stopped?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Close the session with, “Lord, Prepare Me to Be Your Sanctuary”

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for purity and upright leadership in the body of Christ. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 23-March 29

Monday	Psalm 50:1-15 (Offer Sacrifice of Thanksgiving to God)
Tuesday	Leviticus 22:17-25 (Bring Acceptable Offerings to the Lord)
Wednesday	Malachi 1:11-14 (God’s Name Is Great Among Nations)
Thursday	Malachi 2:10-16 (Be Faithful to One Another)
Friday	Malachi 2:17–3:4 (Messenger of Judgment Coming)
Saturday	Malachi 3:7-12 (God’s Blessings and Delights Await)
Sunday	Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6 (Leading in Troubled Times)