

April 22, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Don't Forget His Honor (part 3)

Malachi 2:1-9

1. Be Warned (verses 1-4)
2. Be Faithful (verses 5-9)
 - a. Fear the LORD (verse 5b).
 - b. Teach the truth (verse 6a).
 - c. Talk with righteousness (verse 6b).
 - d. Walk with God (verse 6c).
 - e. Turn others from iniquity (verse 6d).
 - f. Treasure up knowledge (verse 7a).
 - g. Instruct the seekers (verse 7b).
 - h. Speak for God (verse 7c).

Throughout the history of Israel and throughout the history of the church, there has always been the need for spiritual leaders to arise and lead the people of God. Those who lead God's people need to lead them His way. They need to be godly. God needs to be at the center of their lives. God needs to be at the center of their thinking, their passions, their homes, their marriages, and their words. They need to lead with sacrifice. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." (Mark 10:43). They need to promote righteous living. Righteous living begins with the cross of Christ, where we can get our righteousness. And righteous living continues in following the LORD by faith. Those who lead the people of God need to lead them in the ways of God. They aren't to promote themselves; they are to promote God.

Strong, godly, committed leaders have always been the need for the people of God. The Bible is full of such men. Names come to mind, such as Moses, Joshua, David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, Nehemiah. In their days, God was faithful to bless His people. When there are no spiritual leaders to lead the people, they go astray. A case in point is what took place in the book of Judges. When there were no leaders in the land, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The course of the history has told the story of leaders who have failed in their leadership. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. Eli's sons failed in their leadership. Saul failed in his leadership. Jeroboam failed in his leadership. Ahab failed in his leadership. As a result of their failures, life was difficult for the people of God, as the LORD's blessing was removed from them.

Today in our text, we find Israel in one of those difficult times. Their leaders, the priests, had failed in their duties. As a result, the people followed. And as a result, God's curse was upon them all. Please consider our text.

Malachi 2:1-9

"And now this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts. "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. 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."

As you can tell from the very first verse, these words are directed toward the priests of Malachi's day. Verse 1 begins, "And now this commandment is for you, O priests." The priests here were singled out and identified as the recipients of these very difficult words to hear.

Now, in actuality, the priests have been the focus of Malachi's rebuke since early in chapter 1. Look back at chapter 1, verse 6, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name." All the rest of chapter 1 is about the priests, who failed in their duties in leading the people.

Fundamentally, these priests had failed to honor the LORD (as verse 6 indicates). They failed to honor Him in bringing defective sacrifices, contrary to the clear teaching of Leviticus (verses 8, 13). They failed to honor Him, by viewing their work as drudgery and a hardship (verse 13). They failed to honor Him, by failing to worship the LORD in accordance with His greatness (verses 11, 14). "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 145:3).

As a result, they despised the name of the LORD (verse 6). they defiled the LORD(verse 7), and they profaned the name of the LORD(verse 12). All in all, their actions brought great dishonor upon the LORD.

In our application of these words over the past few weeks, I have focused our attention upon the application to the congregation. Though these words were written to the leaders of the temple, I feel like it has been appropriate to apply it to all of us in the congregation. In our worship, we need to bring our best, knowing that if a king would accept it, neither will God accept it either. We need to worship with purity, enthusiasm, and with reverence. I have felt the warrant to apply these words to all of you in the congregation, as so much of chapter 1 deals with the people bringing the sacrifice and participating in the worship. To be sure, it was ultimately the priests who were responsible for sin in the camp, as they were the ones who tolerated these sacrifices. But, the application to all of us has certainly been appropriate.

However, the congregational application of these words we find here in chapter 2 are a bit more difficult. I say this because they speak directly to spiritual leaders and their responsibilities of leadership. For instance, verses 6 and 7 and 8 all refer to the teaching and instruction and leading and guiding that is the responsibility of the leaders of the church.

And so, this morning, my message isn't so much geared to all of you as a congregation as it is to the leaders of this church. So, fellow elders and deacons, please pay attention. But beyond each of you, we also have begun to raise up some men who have been teaching our flock groups in recent days. I'm preaching to you men as well, who are involved in teaching our congregation. You can also press the applications of these words to those who serve in Children's Church as well. Should you want to, you can even press these applications to parents, who are teaching their children in the home. So, don't feel as if you can tune out because these words don't apply to you. Surely you can find some application somewhere.

In our text this morning, the theme of honoring the LORD continues to remain front and center. Look at verse 2, "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you."

At stake is the honor of the LORD! My message this morning is appropriately entitled, "Don't Forget His Honor (part 3)." The priests in Malachi's day had forgotten! All who lead God's people need to keep God's honor front and center. My message this morning has two points. My first point is this:

1. Be Warned (verses 1-4)

Verses 1-4 are a word of warning. We need to learn a lesson from these words of warning and rebuke: the LORD is jealous for His honor.

This word translated "honor" in Malachi (1:6;2:1) is the common Hebrew word, which literally means, "heavy" or "weighty." It is usually translated, "glory." And the LORD is jealous for His glory. You start taking away His glory, and He becomes angry.

This word is used in that famous verse in Isaiah 42:8, where the LORD declares, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another." God alone is to be worshiped. When that doesn't take place, His anger burns, and His curses come.

I have children at home who act this very thing out. From time to time, one of them is playing with something. Along comes another child and begins to play with some portion that the first child happened to be using. Sparks often fly during these moments. It is similar to what takes place with the LORD. Should you begin to take away from His glory and His wrath will be directed toward you.

Here in Malachi 2, we see the anger of the LORD burning against those who are robbing God of His glory. Particularly, they are coming with a curse. Look at verse 2 again to see the promise of His curses that come. "If you do not listen, and if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart."

When God brings a blessing upon a people there is life and happiness and joy and peace and safety. But, when God brings a curse upon a people there is death and misery and sadness and strife and danger. God's curse comes upon all who fail to honor the name of the LORD, especially those who lead others in failing to honor the LORD.

Now, particularly in this text, we see the LORD saying that He would "curse your blessings." Though blessings were pronounced by the priests, they would result in curses.

In the book of Numbers, the LORD gave the priests a blessing that they were to say before the people (Num. 6:24-26). I'm sure that this was repeated millions of times to Israel over the years. Picture the priests standing before all the people, with hands out-stretched, reciting the blessing before all the people, ...

The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.

Though the words may have come from their mouths in this way, the LORD was transforming the words to say the opposite. Perhaps you have seen sometimes on television where editors have dubbed in different words for what someone actually says. At times, this is done with great humorous effect. In many ways, this is what the LORD promised to do with the blessings the priests were offering. God promised to "curse your blessings" (verse 2). It was as if the priests were saying,

The LORD curse you, and abandon you;
The LORD make His anger rise against you, and be hostile toward you;

The LORD lift up His wrath against you, and give you strife.

As these priests had failed “to take it to heart to give honor” to His name, so the LORD made their blessings to be cursings. Such actions were entirely consistent with everything that the LORD had revealed to Israel and to these priests about His jealousy for His own glory!

When He gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, He warned the people not to worship or serve any other Gods, “for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate me” (Ex. 20:5). “You fail to bring me honor, and I will visit your iniquity! Your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren will feel the effects of your sin.”

Particularly, to the priests, it was very clear that a curse would come upon those who failed to come before the LORD in an unworthy manner. “Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the LORD. Say to them, ‘If any man among all your descendants throughout your generations approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from before Me; I am the LORD’” (Leviticus 22:2-3).

In other words, if the priests failed to come before the LORD as commanded, a curse would come: the priest would be cut off from the people. And so, the LORD’s words here of curse shouldn’t have been a great surprise to the priests. They should have known that such a curse was coming for their disobedience to serve Him. God visited their iniquity upon them. He removed them and brought more curse upon their children.

Perhaps they may have been surprised at the severity of the curse. Verse 3 is quite severe. As I take you through the words of verse 3, I trust that you will be shocked. And yet, these words come from the mouth of the living God. “Behold, (1) I am going to rebuke your offspring, and (2) I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and (3) you will be taken away with it.”

First of all, the curse will come upon the offspring of the priests. Their children will feel the effects of the sin of their fathers. Their sin was so bad and so blatant and so dishonoring to the LORD, that He will afflict their children.

Verse 3 continues with the shame that the LORD was to bring upon the priests. He said, “I will spread refuse on your faces.” To understand these words, you need to understand the sacrifices. In the burnt offering, the entire carcass of the animals were to be consumed in the fire of the sacrifice. But, in the sin offerings, there were certain portions of the animals that were discarded at the time of the sacrifice. Not all of the animal was burned. It was the fat, the kidneys, and the liver which were to be offered up in smoke. The meat of the offering was set aside as food for the priests (Lev. 6:24-29). But, “the hide of the bull and all its flesh with its head and its legs and its entrails and its refuse” were to be brought outside the camp where they were to be burned (Lev. 4:11).

Those portions to be burned outside the camp included much of the digestive track, from the stomach through all of the intestines. When the LORD says that “I will spread refuse on your faces,” he’s talking about the portion of the sacrifice that is in the stomach and the intestines. This is why there is a variance in translations here. The ESV (and KJV) translates this using the word, “dung,” referring to portion ready to be eliminated the animal. The New American Standard has a footnote that reads, “vomit,” referring to the food in the stomach at the time of the sacrifice, just beginning its course down the digestive tract. The NIV here uses the obscure word, “offal” which refers to the inner parts of the body, other than muscles or bones. Other translations use the word, “refuse,” which is also a reference to the inner parts of the animals.

The idea is pretty disgusting. God said that He would take these inner parts of the animal that was sacrificed (the stinky, smelly parts, which are fit only for the toilet—your vomit and your feces) and spread them on the faces of the priests. He says that He will take the remains of your feasts, the sewage in your toilets, and smear it all over your face. It’s a picture of God’s disgust with the priests who would dishonor Him as they did.

In our culture, a common sign of humiliation is to have a pie thrown into your face. Clowns are often throwing pies in the faces of each other. We usually fill these pies with whipped cream. Though you can eat the cream on your face, it’s pretty disgusting when it gets into your eyes and up your nose. I have had a few pies thrown in my face over the years. It’s always been in good nature fun.

But, God says here to the priests who would fail in giving honor to His name that He would throw a pie in their face. Only, he wouldn’t make it with whipped cream from a can. He would make it from the feces that run down your toilet. He would make it from the vomit of those who are sick. So, picture this pie pan filled with this brownish, blackish sludge. Picture this pan coming to your face and smeared all over it.

Are any of you feeling grossed out at this moment? Good. Because I have merely brought you into the very emotion that God wants to stir in our hearts with these words. They aren’t pleasant words. They are words of rebuke and I want for you to feel them strongly.

Finally, verse 3 ends with a final curse upon them, “and you will be taken away with it. The priest knew full well what to do with the inner portions of the animal. They were to discard it and burn it. It’s not good enough to remain in the temple to be burned upon the altar. So also was God communicating to these priests that they weren’t good enough for Him. They had dishonored Him in offering up the defective sacrifices. And now, the LORD was going to reject these priests. They would be cast out, without job, cursed and away from God.

Ultimately, these actions were to be an object lesson for all to see. Verse 4 says, “Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi” says the LORD of hosts. These actions were to be a sort of proof that the LORD was concerned with His honor. In chapter 1, verse 10, the LORD cried out, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!” As nobody arose to close the gates, the LORD was planning on striking down the priests. With them gone, so will the displeasing sacrifices be removed as well.

When you see men in the ministry shamed publicly for their sins, know that this is what the LORD desires to see of those who are unfaithful in leading His church. When a leader of a large evangelical organization is exposed for having homosexual relationships with a male prostitute

for years, know that the LORD desires this man to be greatly humiliated and "taken away!" God wants great shame to be brought upon this man for failing to bring the proper honor to His name that He deserves. In the church, there are great consequences for leaders who fail in their duties. In 1 Timothy 5:19-20, Paul was speaking of sinning elders. "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."

When a leader in the church is unfaithful in his calling, refusing counsel, and continuing in his sin, then, he is to be rebuked publicly and strongly for his unrepentance. The purpose of doing so is so that other leaders might be fearful of sinning, lest they receive similar shame as well.

God has a high view of those serving as leaders in the church. For those aspiring to be elders, "it is a fine work [they] desire to do." Deacons who serve well "obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." But those who fail to lead the congregation in paths of bringing honor to the LORD ought to be rebuked in great ways, even sewage slop thrown in their faces!

Though the LORD may have given up on these priests who were bringing dishonor to His name, He never gave up on the priesthood. At the end of verse 4, He said, "that My covenant may continue with Levi."

When the LORD established His covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai, it was clear that those who would serve in the temple as priests would be the Levites. They were in charge of maintaining the tabernacle. They were in charge of setting it up, breaking it down, carrying it in their wanderings (Num. 3-4). When Israel came into the promised land, the Levites were appointed an inheritance, because the LORD, the God of Israel, [was] their inheritance (Joshua 13:33).

God wasn't going to give up on the Levites to serve before Him with the sacrifices. But, He was finished with these particular priests, who failed to honor His name. They would be taken away (verse 3). But, God would continue on with the Levites (verse 4).

In other words, since these priests were unfaithful in maintaining the honor of the LORD, He was going to remove them from office and bring in other Levites who would be faithful, and who would offer up pleasing sacrifices to the LORD. The entire sacrificial system didn't rely upon these particular priests being faithful to their calling.

To be sure, the LORD made a covenant with Levi, but there were plenty of Levites who could be found to replace the unfaithful priests. When Nadab and Abihu demonstrated themselves to be unfaithful, the LORD removed them and replaced them with their brothers, Eleazar and Ithamar (Lev. 10:1-7). When Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, proved themselves to be "worthless men," (1 Sam. 2:12) who "despised the offering of the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:17), the LORD struck down these two priests (1 Sam. 2:34), and promised to raise up "a faithful priest who will do according to what is in [God's] heart" (1 Sam. 2:35).

In Jeremiah's day, the entire land was defiled due to the leadership. "Both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness," declares the LORD (Jer. 23:11). As a result, the LORD drove them away into exile. But, God didn't give up on His Levites serving as priests. When the people of Israel came back into the land and the temple was rebuilt, "the Levites [were appointed] to oversee the work of the house of the LORD" (Ezra 3:8).

The parallels here with the church are many. Certainly, there will be those in the church who lead the people of God astray. To the elders of the church of Ephesus, Paul warned, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The warning is that those who have been commissioned as elders of the church will arise, seeking a following after themselves, rather than leading people to Christ. How appropriate is this for our text this morning. Leading others to yourself is certainly taking away from the honor that is due the LORD of hosts. Such leaders should be removed from the church.

In Timothy 1:7, Paul warned Timothy of men in the church who "want to be teachers, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." These people turn aside to "fruitless discussion," leading others to speculation, rather than "furthering the administration of God which is by faith" (1 Tim. 1:4, 6). These men fail to lead people to "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5), which is the goal of all Biblical leading. These men are to be rebuked (1 Tim. 1:3).

Though the LORD has promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), His promise doesn't extend to every local church. When leaders prove themselves to be unfaithful to their calling, the LORD may well disgrace them and cause that particular local church to cease. We see examples of this in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. Jesus writes to these churches, warning them of their false teaching, leading people away from the glory of God. To Ephesus, He says, "repent ... or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent" (Rev. 2:5). This means that I'll take your church away. To the other churches, similar warnings come: "Unless you repent, I will come and remove you."

But, the promise of Christ to build His church remains strong and true! He's going to build His church. Rock Valley Bible Church may (or may not) be in His future. Much of it depends upon the faithfulness of the leaders to heed the warning. But, the church of Christ will remain until He returns. So, church leaders, flock teachers, children's church teachers, future leaders, parents, ... Be Warned (verses 1-4). Be warned that His wrath will come upon those who aren't faithful in leading the people of God to give appropriate honor to the LORD.

The second admonition comes in verses 5-9.
2. Be Faithful (verses 5-9)

In verse 5, we see the LORD mention a covenant that He made with the Levites, "My covenant with him was one of life and peace." There is difficulty in understanding exactly what this is referring to.

In the entire Bible, we have descriptions of many covenants that God made with people. We have a description of the covenant that God made with **Adam**. "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). We have a description of the covenant that God made with **Noah**. "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). We have a description of the covenant that God made with **Abraham**. "I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7-8). We have a description of the covenant that God made with **David**. "I will give you rest from all your enemies. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:11-13). We have a description of the **New Covenant**, "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" (Jer. 31:33). But, nowhere in Scripture do we have recorded for us a covenant that God made specifically with Levi.

There are several other places in Scripture, where you get a hint that this covenant existed. In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, Moses blesses each of the tribes of Israel. When blessing Levi, he mentions the covenant that he kept. In Nehemiah 13:29, Nehemiah mentions of the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. There may be another possible reference to this covenant in Jeremiah 33:20-21.

But, in none of these passages is the existence of this covenant as clear as it is here in Malachi. In fact, this is the only passage in the entire Scripture that uses the phrase, "the covenant of Levi" covenant. It's mentioned three times (verse 4, 5, 8).

Some would say that this covenant refers to the covenant that the LORD made with Phinehas, who was a Levite. If you would like to be encouraged some time with a great story of someone's zeal for the LORD, you simply need to read the story of Phinehas, as recorded in Numbers 25.

Israel was encamped at Shittim. The people "began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab" (Num. 25:1). They sacrificed to their gods (Num. 25:2). As a result of their idolatry, the LORD instructed Moses to have those who went after other gods to be slaughtered (Num. 25:3-5). Soon afterwards, while Israel was weeping in repentance, "one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel" (Num. 25:6). "When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body" (Num. 25:7-8). As a result of the zeal of Phinehas, the plague on the sons of Israel, which killed 24,000, was checked.

For his zeal, the LORD spoke to Moses saying, ...

Numbers 25:11-13

Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, "Behold, I **give him My covenant of peace**; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel."

Here is a covenant that God explicitly made with Phinehas, a Levite. The only difficulty with identifying this covenant with the "covenant of Levi" mentioned in Malachi is that the scope of this covenant is too small. It's only with one man and his posterity. It's not with the entire tribe of Levi.

So, I believe that the best way to understand "the covenant of Levi" is to understand it in relation to the law that was given to the entire nation of Israel. To the Levites were given the duties of the religious life of the people of Israel. They were to maintain the temple grounds. They were to handle the temple utensils. They were to offer up the sacrifices. They were to teach and lead the people. They were to walk before the people as models of righteousness. They were to be the mouth of God to the people. [\[1\]](#)

The result of these things would be "life and peace" as verse 5 says. It would be "life" and "peace" for the priests. It would be "life" and "peace" for the people. The blessing of the LORD is upon those whose leaders are walking rightly with Him.

Now, in verses 5-7, the LORD paints a picture of the priest that honors the LORD. In these verses, the LORD appears to be describing a particular priest who was particularly well-suited for the ministry. Consider these verses.

Malachi 2:5-6

He revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity.

We don't know who this was. Perhaps the LORD was talking about Levi, the son of Jacob. Perhaps he was describing Phinehas, who was indeed one who feared the LORD. However, we know so little about either of these men, that we can hardly know for sure if all of these things describe either of them. In any event, it is clear that the LORD was describing what sort of man a priest must be. They describe a faithful ministry for us.

I want to run through these verses, picking out each of these characteristics of faithful ministry. I have identified eight of them. Since there are so many characteristics, I'll simply run through each of them quickly. Each of these characteristics are general enough to apply almost directly to the Christian ministry today.

A faithful ministry will, ...

a. Fear the LORD (verse 5b).

This comes straight from verse 5, "I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name."

A leadership that thinks little of God will cultivate a people with a low view of God. A leadership that thinks much of God will cultivate a people with a high view of God. And where God is viewed highly, He will be honored.

The fear of the LORD is the most basic, fundamental attitude that we need to have before the LORD as we approach Him. Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." This is the most basic thing to Christian living. This is the most basic thing to Christian ministry. We must always maintain a healthy fear of the LORD.

The fear of the LORD will give you a zeal for the ministry. It's what spurred Phinehas with righteous anger to spear the man who was blatantly opposing the will of the LORD. The fear of the LORD will drive you to your knees in prayer, pleading for His help.

The fear of the LORD will cause you to walk in humility, because you know how great He is! The fear of the LORD will drive you to tremble at His Word, seeking guidance from it. The fear of the LORD will seek His glory above all else. We fear what would happen to our souls, should we steal away the glory of God! The fear of the LORD will give you motivation to live a holy life. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The fear of the LORD will give you reason to cling to Christ. You have no hope of standing before the LORD on your own merit. Your only hope is Christ Jesus, raised from the dead! The fear of the LORD will lead you to tell others of Christ. (2 Cor. 5:11, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men") We persuade others to believe, because we know what takes place after you die! There is only one way to stand rightly before God, that is, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Secondly, a faithful ministry will, ...

b. Teach the truth (verse 6a).

The beginning of verse 6 reads, "True instruction was in his mouth."

When the priest taught, it was to be true to the law of God. He was to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Don't stop short of the truth and fall into liberalism. Don't go further than the truth and advance into legalism. Toe the line of Scripture. Go as far as Scripture does, but no further.

Through the years, the Jews struggled with keeping this line. We know in the days of Jesus, that the Pharisees went far beyond the line of Scripture. They developed a complete set of oral teaching that came to be just as authoritative as the Scripture itself. Their tradition is called the Talmud. In it, they sought to quantify all of life. The Jewish Rabbis regulated how far you could walk on the Sabbath (Acts 1:12), what you could do on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:2), and how to wash your hands before you eat (Matthew 15:2). In developing all of these traditions, they ended up transgressing the word of God, and leading others to do the same (Matt. 15:3-9).

Also, in the days of Jesus, the Sadducees fell far short of the line of Scripture. They denied all Scripture except for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. They denied the resurrection. They denied angels. They denied the spirit (Acts 23:8). They didn't embrace the power of God as revealed in the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29).

For us today, this is no different. When a church leader preaches or teaches or counsels, it must be the truth of the word of God that comes from his lips. Away with opinions and falsehood and in with the truth.

Thirdly, a faithful ministry will, ...

c. Talk with righteousness (verse 6b).

Again, this comes from verse 6, "unrighteousness was not found on his lips."

This is describing the man who speaks what is right and appropriate. When he speaks, he speaks with integrity. When he speaks, he speaks with honesty. When he speaks, he speaks what is appropriate. A spiritual leader will not allow "filthiness or silly talk, or coarse jesting" to come from his mouth. But rather, "the giving of thanks" will ever be on his lips (Eph. 5:4).

Righteous talk is more than simply clean talk that doesn't use certain words. It includes entire sentences. It includes entire paragraphs, entire thoughts, entire conversations. Righteous talk will lead others to righteousness. The righteous mouth will speak highly of God. The righteous mouth will build others up with his words. His words will be encouraging. His words will be edifying. His words will be God-honoring.

Charles Spurgeon once said it very well. He said, ...

Consider yourself, after all, as being very much responsible for the conversation which goes on where you are; for such is the esteem in which you will usually be held, that you will be the helmsman of the conversation. Therefore, steer it into a good channel. Do this without roughness or force. Keep the points of the line in good order, and the train will run on to your rails without a jerk. Be ready to seize opportunities adroitly, and lead on imperceptibly in the desired track. If your heart is in it and your wits are awake, this will be easy enough, especially if you breathe a prayer for guidance. [\[2\]](#)

Fourthly, a faithful ministry will, ...

d. Walk with God (verse 6c).

Again, look at verse 6, "He walked with me in peace and uprightness."

"Walking" is a common metaphor used in the Bible to describe one's life. You can find it often. Enoch is described as a man who "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22). Noah also "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). [\[3\]](#)

"Walking with God" describes the man who lives in accordance with the ways of God. When the LORD provided Manna for the people of God, it was a test to see whether or not they would walk in His instruction or not. Obeying the commandments of God is described as "walking in His ways" (Deut. 28:9).

We began our worship service this morning by looking at Psalm 16. In verse 8 of this Psalm, David says, "I have set the LORD continually before me." That's what it means to walk with God. It means living every day with the LORD's presence ever before you. It means "rejoicing always" (1 Thess. 5:16). It means "praying without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). It means "giving thanks in everything" (1 Thess. 5:18). It means being sensitive to the leading of God. It means filtering all of life through the Scriptures and the truth of God and responding appropriately.

It implies a measure of righteousness. It also implies a measure of contrition and confession. David was a man after God's own heart. But, he was not perfect. But, he was repentant! The man who walks with God will certainly stray from the path from time to time. The one who walks with God will get back on the path.

Fifthly, a faithful ministry will, ...

e. Turn others from iniquity (verse 6d).

This comes from the last phrase of verse 6, "and he turned many back from iniquity."

When we initially think about turning others from iniquity in the Old Testament, we naturally think first about the prophets. Their message may be easily summarized with one word: "Repent!" But, the priests weren't at all relieved of this duty, simply because it was the job of the prophet to call people to repentance.

The life of the priest was to walk with God for all to see what godliness looks like. His talk was to be righteous talk, so that others would hear how a godly man thinks. His message was to be the truth of God, which, if followed, would lead people away from their sin and into righteousness.

Due to their sin, people will find themselves facing difficulties in their lives. In these times, they will often turn to others for help. Blessed was the priest in Malachi's day who counseled with these people and turned them away from their sin and to the ways of righteousness. Blessed are those in our day, who turn people from their wicked ways and guide them in the truth of the gospel.

I was recently shown a verse in Daniel 12:3 about the blessing upon those who lead many in the ways of righteousness. This verse says that they will "shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." This is speaking of the eternal blessing to those who are in the business of sharing the gospel with others and seeing them come to Christ.

In recent days, we have had a man come and join us who has taken this verse to heart and has sought to make it his life's aim. He has written up a booklet entitled, "What the Bible says about Eternal Life." He has distributed several thousand of these forty page booklets. This past week, he received an email from a friend, who recently visited a youth detention center for boys. His friend wrote, ...

"I pray a lot before I go, asking the Lord to help me in bringing the truth of His Word to these young men, and that they will be attentive and truly seek His truth. Last week, I asked Him if it would be possible to bring at least 1 person to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior and that He make the group small as this makes it easier to focus on 1 or 2 people if they appear to be really seeking Him. The Lord blessed me with four young men, one who had just accepted the Lord two days ago on Easter Sunday. I asked him what happened, that is, how he got saved. He said he had been going [through] this pamphlet he had in his room that was on eternal life. He said someone from a church had written it, but he could not remember who. he said he went through it quite thoroughly and finally got to a page that invited you to pray and accept the Lord as your Savior. He said this was what he had been truly wanting to do, but never knew how. I could tell by talking with him, he really did accept Jesus - the joy of his salvation showed in everything he said. I think we all know where he got that booklet on eternal life from. [\[4\]](#)

The seed has been sown through this booklet. It landed on some good soil. This young man was turned back from iniquity. The result will be eternal blessings to my new friend who wrote the booklet.

Such is the a characteristic of a faithful ministry.

Sixth, a faithful ministry will, ...

f. Treasure up knowledge (verse 7a).

This comes at the beginning of verse 7, "The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge."

Particularly, here, Malachi must be talking about the knowledge of God and of His word. There is no particular use for a priest to be an expert in farming or in construction or in water purification. These things are important for the continuance of civilization, but they aren't important to the priest. The priest was to be an expert in God's word. He was to be filled with it. He was to know it, so that he could teach it to others.

The priest was to memorize it and meditate upon it. The priest was to be consumed with it!

Have you ever met people who have been consumed with some particular activity or topic or even? They know all about it. They talk all about it. It has so consumed them that they can hardly talk about anything else. So should the priests have been with their knowledge of and passion for the truth of the Word of God. This applies directly to all who are in ministry today. This leads nicely into the next characteristic.

Seventh, a faithful ministry will, ...

g. Instruct the seekers (verse 7b).

Verse 7 continues, "men should seek instruction from his mouth."

This simply implies that those looking to find the eternal truth should seek it from the priest, who should be filled with the knowledge of God and His ways. But, verse 7 seems to say something more than this. It appears to place obligation upon the priest to have his knowledge of the word of God to be an attractive thing to others, so that they are drawn to him. He should live and act and speak in such a manner that people should long to be with this sort of man, because they know that from his mouth will flow wisdom from above and they want to be like this man in all that they do.

They will be instructed in how to live. They will go away with a greater sense of God. They will hear and marvel at God's grace and kindness to us. They will receive answers to their question. They will want to be like Him. A faithful ministry will be a ministry that will attract the godly.

Perhaps you remember the old television commercials where they were situated in a crowded restaurant with all of the hustle and bustle of restaurant life. Waiters are serving their patrons. People are talking with each other. There's activity behind the grill. The conversation at the table in focus is between two business men. They are talking about the things of life. At one point the conversation turns to talking about brokers and investments. One of the men says, "Well, my broker is E. F. Hutton. And E. F. Hutton says, ..." At that point, the entire restaurant becomes silent. Conversations stop. People strain to listen to what was about to be said. Cars outside the restaurant stop and drivers earnestly try to listen to what will be said next.

That's the idea here of a what a faithful priest in Malachi's day should have been. When he spoke, men would seek instruction from him. He was respected. The things out of his mouth were worth the listening to.

Sadly, the story of E. F. Hutton is that they went out of business. I'm told that they gave bad advice. This is similar to what these priests were doing. Rather than instructing the seekers in the way of righteousness, they were being instructed in paths of ungodliness. "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" (Mal. 2:8).

Finally, a faithful minister will:

h. Speak for God (verse 7c).

This comes at the end of verse 7, "for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

This is how the LORD has made the world. He has left us His word. He has left us with His servants, who are to be about the business of spreading His message to the world and that's what we are. Leaders in the church are messengers of the LORD of hosts. They speak for God!

You can get this wrong or you can get this right. You can get this wrong if you think that the words of a pastor are the words that God **is giving** to the world. You can get it right if you think that the words of a pastor are the message that God **has already given** to the world. We are God's messenger. In His word, He has revealed Himself to us. We are to go and tell others about Him.

We are mailmen. We are delivery boys. We are couriers. No self-respecting mailman will take the envelope, open it up, change the message, seal it again, and then deliver it. Our authority runs out when God's word runs out.

Well, there we have the characteristics of a faithful ministry. A faithful ministry will (1) Fear the LORD (verse 5b); (2) Teach the truth (verse 6a); (3) Talk with righteousness (verse 6b); (4) Walk with God (verse 6c); (5) Turn others from iniquity (verse 6d); (6) Treasure up knowledge (verse 7a); (7) Instruct the seekers (verse 7b); (8) Speak for God (verse 7c).

Now, unfortunately, the priests in Malachi's day had failed miserably. The following verses demonstrate this clearly.

Malachi 2:8-9

"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."

These two verses are a great summary of the entire section of Scripture. These priests had failed in their duties and the LORD had cast them off. Rather than turning people to God, their lives have directed them away from the LORD. Rather than teaching them in the ways of God, their teaching has led them down the paths of destruction.

As we reflect upon all of these characteristics, each and every leader in the church may well face a bit of discouragement in failing to follow after all of these ideals. In a very real sense, every leader will fail. God knows that. He is looking for contrition from those who fail and a renewed pledge to seek the LORD's help.

The LORD knew that this would be the case. When Hophni and Phinehas failed in their priestly duties, the LORD promised to bring along a perfectly faithful priest. "I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always" (1 Sam. 2:35).

Of course, this is talking about the Lord Jesus. In every way, He was the perfect priest. He never sinned. He offered up the perfect sacrifice (of Himself). Even now, He ever lives to make intercession for us on His behalf. Though we may fail, God has established for Himself a perfect priest to provide our way to God.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 22, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] For further study, you might consider the words that the LORD spoke with Aaron in Numbers 18. Perhaps this is the reference that Malachi is referring to.

[2] Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students, p. 171.

[3] The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge contains the following as a start of references to people walking with God (or in His ways). Gen 6:9; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; Ex. 16:4; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 5:33; 13:4; 28:9; 1 Kings 2:4; 2 Kings 20:3; Ps. 16:8; 26:11; 56:13; 86:11; 116:9; 128:1; Song 1:4; Hos. 14:9; Amos 3:3; Mic. 4:5; 6:8; Mal 2:6; Luke 1:6; Acts' 9:31; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:15; Col. 1:10; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1; Heb. 11:5, 6; 1 John 1:7.

[4] This email was given to me shortly before our church service began. It was such an encouragement to me as well as a great illustration of this characteristic of a faithful priest, that I included it in my message.