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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

The Bible places a premium upon spiritual leadership.

The priests in the Old

Testament were specifically chosen by the Lord (cp. Num. 3:44-48; 18:8-24). They had to be, not only from the tribe of Levi, but also from the family of Aaron. Then in the New Testament we read about the qualifications for pastors and deacons (cp. 1 Tim. 3:1-16; Tit. 1:5-9). This explains why today churches are to have high standards for their pastors, deacons, and leaders. When leaders do not lead in the way they ought to lead, it has a detrimental effect on their followers. Bad leadership results in bad "follow-ship."

Malachi 2 has to do with leadership in Malachi's day, but it also talks about stewardship. Are you wondering what leadership has to do with stewardship? Normally, when we think about stewardship, we think in terms of money. It is true that money is involved in the matter of

stewardship, but there is more to stewardship than just money. Stewardship means "trusteeship." As believers we are to be good stewards of everything God has given to us. This includes not only our money, time, and talent, but also our spiritual influence. If we are leaders in any capacity, we especially have a stewardship of spiritual influence. It is very important that we take this responsibility seriously because of how it affects others. As we use the outline below and look at problems among Israel's leadership, we will see that they had forgotten their stewardship of spiritual influence. But more than that, we will also learn spiritual lessons for spiritual leaders today.

I. Ministerial Problems (2:1-9)

II. Marital Problems (2:10-16)

III. Moral Problems (2:17)

I. Ministerial Problems (2:1-9)

The Lord, through Malachi, begins chapter 2 by confronting the priests, the spiritual leaders, of Malachi's day. He says, "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you." As we will see, the priests were not living up to their spiritual influence. He continues in verse 2, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give

glory unto My name, saith the Lord ..." A main responsibility of spiritual leadership was and is to give glory to the name of the Lord. This means that spiritual leaders are to live in such a way that the Lord's name is always lifted up and honored. When they do this, the priests' lives will be blessed. But when they do not, their lives will be cursed.

This is why the Lord goes on to say in verse 2, "... 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." The priests had been given the high honor of serving the Lord and, thus, bringing glory to His name. Their positions should have been a source of blessing to them, but



instead they had refused to “lay it to heart” or to take God’s glory seriously.

In verse 3 the Lord tells the priests the consequences of their sins, “Behold, I will corrupt your seed ...” Most Bible teachers believe this is a reference to their children. Tragically, it is the children who suffer the most when there is a lapse in spiritual leadership. The Lord also tells the priests that He will “spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it” (v. 3). First they would be humiliated; then the Lord was going to remove them from their responsibility of leadership if they didn’t change how they were living. In verse 4 He tells them why, “And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that My covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.” They were not just priests because their fathers had been priests before them. They were priests because of the covenant God had made with Aaron and then with Phinehas, Aaron’s grandson, years earlier (cp. Deut. 10:8-9; Num. 3:12; 25:10-13). As priests, they were to take their office and responsibilities seriously. We know two of Aaron’s sons had not, and God had killed them (cp. Lev. 10:1-13).

Starting with verse 5 the Lord shows the priests what true ministerial leadership was all about as He reminds them of His covenant with Aaron. He says,

“My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared Me ...” (v. 5). God gave to Aaron both life and peace. This reminds us that today our spiritual leaders are to be saved. They are to have the eternal life that God gives by means of the new birth. Then, as a result of being saved, they will have peace with God (cp. Rom. 5:1).

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In verse 6 the Lord says, “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.” Now He was saying that spiritual leaders are to know and speak the law of truth. We have a right to expect spiritual leaders to teach the truth of God’s Word and to be honest in their speech. Like Paul did, they should be able to tell others, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

The Lord still has more to say to the priests. He next says, “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” (v. 7). The Lord was not giving the priests new information. They knew how they were supposed to live. But according to verse 8, they had “departed out of the way.” As a result, they had “caused many to stumble at the law” and “corrupted the covenant of Levi.” This still happens today. When spiritual leaders corrupt their calling, they cause immature believers to stumble into sin. They also cause unsaved people to not want to have anything to do with God.

How was God going to respond to the priests’ sins? “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” (v. 9). He was saying that the priests were no longer going to be honored and respected by the people. Instead, the people would look down on them.

Sadly, much of the disrespect spiritual leaders experience today is because of their inconsistencies.

Reflection Connection

Read Romans 2:24 and discuss how it is a reminder that believers can be such a poor testimony that non-believers want nothing to do with God.



II. Marital Problems (2:10-16)

Starting in verse 10, the Lord has Malachi make a rather interesting turn. He begins, “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?” (v. 10). He takes them back to their very beginning and then asks the people why they had broken faith as he launches into a discussion about marriage.

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We read next, “Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god” (v. 11). The Lord was now addressing a problem the Jews

had struggled with throughout their Old Testament history. It was that of intermarrying. The Lord had made it very clear that they were not to intermarry because the pagans would lead them away from the Lord (cp. Deut. 7:3-4). But just as in Moses’ day, the people of Malachi’s day ignored the Lord’s commandment. The men were actually divorcing their Israelite wives to marry pagan women. They were guilty of both adultery and idolatry. But they still wanted to worship the Lord with their offerings and wondered why He would not accept them (vv. 12-13).

For us today, the Bible also makes it very clear that believers are to marry believers. We are not to “be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14), but we are to marry “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). Yet, too many times believers think they can marry an unbeliever and win their mate to the Lord. This may happen, and we thank the Lord when it does happen. But sadly, it may not happen.

In verse 14 the Lord shows the impact the marital problems were having on the families. He says, “Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.” The word

“companion” means “she is one bound to thee.” When we get married we form a partnership and are bound to one another. But in Malachi’s day, by divorcing their wives to marry pagan women, the men were dealing treacherously against the wives of their youth, their companions. Even today men are still dealing treacherously against “the wife of their youth,” and many times wives are just as guilty as their husbands. We are living in a day when we have serious problems in our marriages, even among believers.

The Lord says in verse 15, “And did not He make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.” God’s original plan has always been one man for one woman and one woman for one man. He made Adam and then Eve as his help meet. He could have breathed into existence a different plan, but He didn’t. So why was this God’s plan? The rest of verse 15 tells us, “... that He might seek a godly seed.” This is where the children come in. Marriage puts a family together, and it is in the family where the children are to learn about the Lord.

As we all know too well, marital problems lead to the matter of divorce. This is why we read in



verse 16, “For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away ...” Literally, it is saying that God hates divorce. He hates it because of what it does to the two mates involved, as well as to their children. We need to make sure we do not misunderstand this verse. It does not say that God hates the divorced person. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. For every divorced person, there is forgiveness from the Lord and the blessing of forgetting the past and looking with confidence and faith toward the future.

Did you note how verse 16 also talked about the one who

“covereth violence with his garments”? In Old Testament days they had a ceremony they used that when a man proposed to a young lady, he would take his garment and lay it over her. This helps us understand why Ruth told Boaz to lay his skirt over her (cp. Ruth 3:9). Today the man puts an engagement ring on his future wife’s finger. But in verse 16 the Lord is talking about the sacredness of marriage. When a marriage is broken up, it is tearing something that is very sacred. It is like ripping a garment in two.

What are the results of a man and woman honoring their

marriage vows to each other and before the Lord? It is a godly seed. Children are much more likely to want to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior when they have parents who have a real and growing relationship with the Lord and live it before their children. This should be every Christian couple’s goal for their lives and their children.

Reflection Connection

According to Matthew 19:5-6, what is God’s role in marriage? Discuss what this should mean to every married believer today.

III. Moral Problems (2:17)

Chapter 2 ends with verse 17. We read, “Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them ...” The Lord says He is tired of listening to them. Then, just as we saw in our lesson from chapter 1 and as they said in verse 14, they again sarcastically reply, “Wherein?” or “Oh, really?” We have already seen how the priests had caused the people to stumble because they were not living to bring glory to the name of the Lord. Now, the people no longer knew the difference between good and evil. The spiritual leaders had

removed the absolutes found in God’s Word, so the people were now saying that their sins did not matter to God, plus He was too nice to judge their sins.

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Does any of this sound familiar? We have also removed absolute standards in our country because

we have rejected the authority of the Word of God. At the same time, we know what is right and what is wrong. God has put it down in our hearts and He has given it to us in His Word. But when people reject God and His Word for so long, they eventually lose the ability to know the difference between good and evil. Also, how many people today think of God as a doting grandfather in heaven who doesn’t care how we live as long as we are happy? Their favorite belief of God is that He is a God of love.

Verse 17 goes on to say, “... where is the God of judgment?” The people’s last “Oh, really?” was, if everything Malachi said



was true, where was God's judgment? Their sins had blinded them to the curses they were already experiencing. Plus, they did not understand that God was giving them an opportunity to repent. They were an example of Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons

of men is fully set in them to do evil." They would soon meet the God of judgment.

Reflection Connection

Read Romans 2:12-16 and discuss why these verses show that even when people reject the Word of God or do not have access to it, they are still responsible for its truth.

Wrap Up

What does leadership have to do with stewardship? Everything. But are you also thinking, "I am not a priest, a pastor, or even a deacon, so this lesson is not for me"? We are reminded in 1 Peter 2:5 that every believer is a priest. Each one of us is also a spiritual leader in some capacity. It may be as a parent, teacher, neighbor, or older relative; it may be where we work, go to school, live, or attend church. This means we each have a stewardship of responsibility and influence. Someone is watching us, and someone is following us. Let's make sure in whatever capacity we lead that we are good stewards, especially in our spiritual influence with the saved as well as the lost. Remember, "... it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Plus, we all want to one day hear our Lord say to us, "... Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25:21).

