

**Reading:** Malachi 1:6-2:9

**Theme:** The startling diagnosis of the disease of contempt.

We are living in a blame culture. If something goes wrong, see who is to blame and sue them! At the least, aim to shift the blame from ourselves! Sadly, there are some Christians who will always blame others for why they are as they are. They will say it's because of no care and attention from others; or it is too much care and attention from others; the church is too lax or the church is too strict; the teaching isn't substantial enough or the teaching is too heavy etc. It is never their fault that they are not making more progress with the Lord, that they are not growing. It is always because of someone else's fault and even if everything was perfect, they would still blame others.

The people who had returned back to Judah were living at a low spiritual ebb. All were infected with a spiritual disease and yet in 1:6-2:9 the Lord exposes and singles out one part of society in particular - the priests. Even though they are singled out, recognise and realise this disease had spread through all the people and was even affecting the priests.

The priests were of the tribe of Levi, were descendants of Aaron and they had been set aside by God to mediate between God and man, man and God. They had the honour, privilege and duty to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people; they had to teach God's laws and even judge in difficult cases. They, along with the Levites who ministered in the temple, were the spiritual leaders. These priests in particular were singled out as those who should have known better and not be infected with this spiritual disease.

OT-style priests no longer exist in the NT church (*though some think they do!*) There is now no need for sacrifices, no need of a man to mediate between us and God - for we have the once and for all sacrifice for sin i.e. the Lord Jesus and He is the only mediator

between God and men. We have the priestly role of teaching of God and His ways, of declaring God's praise and this is a work and role not just for pastors, elders and deacons, but all believers, for we read in 1 Peter 2:9 that all believers are a royal priesthood. Yet there are those in positions of spiritual authority in a local church and family - so pastors, elders, deacons, preachers, Sunday school teachers, youth workers, parents, husbands, an only Christian in a family. All Christians are in a position of "priest" to teach and show God's word by their lives and to offer the sacrifice of praise. Such realities are not to divert attention from church officers, preachers and teachers who have the primary duty laid on them in the local church for the teaching and preaching of God's word in His ways.

Although I will use the term "priests" or "leaders", even pastor, elders, deacons, I want us all to recognise it applies to us all without exception, but great responsibilities lay on church officers in the consideration of this spiritual infection, disease and malady. Let's learn of the spiritual infection using 3 headings and we will look at 2 this week and the 3rd next time.

### **1. Blunt Diagnosis.**

The Lord's message is a diagnosis to grab their attention at the start of v6 "*A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to me?*" says the LORD Almighty." The priests could think, that was the problem - lack of respect, contempt for them as priests in positions of authority. Then God grabs them by the collar in the next part of v6 "*It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'*" They expected respect, but they showed no respect to the God they viewed as their Father and Master. Surely, He was deserving of honour and respect. The Lord shows, identifies the spiritual disease - **contempt** - they showed contempt for, despised

His name - not just His name, for this represented the whole being and character of God.

All the people, especially the priests, were guilty of contempt, irreverence, of despising the Lord and all He is. They said they regarded Him highly, but their attitudes, practices and lifestyles declared they were infected with the contempt disease and it affected every part of their lives, work and society.

There is a right respect and honour due to those who lead God's work, but such ones must also have a great honour and respect to the Lord. Yet this is to be expected from every Christian. Matthew Henry wrote "*Our relation to God as our Father and Master obliges us to fear and honour Him.*" The lack of respect and the contempt shown by the leaders in Israel were examples, sadly bad examples, which the people followed. Yes, they should have been warned, but sadly so often such ones set the tone for the people to follow. Pray for God's grace in our nation's leaders, and the leaders of this church, in every church, that leaders would be men of God, all out for God and be examples to the flock. This disease, infection was contempt, but see:

## **2. The Symptoms of Contempt.**

The answer of the priests is set before us at the end of v6. They basically ask "*How can you say this?*" The Lord begins to show them the list of symptoms and out workings that proved, demonstrated they were infected with contempt. There are 4 main symptoms the Lord lays before them and us:

**A. Comfortable Worship (v7-8):** under OT regulations concerning the ordering of worship, the people had to come and bring their sacrifices to the temple. The priests would sacrifice them. What was going on that time was that they were offering non-sacrificial sacrifices! They were offering to God the things they didn't want, the leftovers. God's word stated the credentials of the sacrifices -

clean, whole, a specific age. Yet the Jews at that time were offering to God any old sacrifice - blind, crippled, diseased. The whole point of the sacrifice was that it was to cost the person, else it was not a personal sacrifice. Those at that time were “worshipping” God on the cheap!

What of us? Do we have an attitude that says *“Well God ought to be pleased I go to church at all! I am so busy. He ought to be pleased I put anything in collection as there is so much demand on my money.”* Basically, we may feel anything is good enough for God. So many put careers, relationships, finances, leisure etc. before God and then God can have what is leftover.

Please, please do not get me wrong here. I am NOT saying we need to do more, give more, get to more meetings (*unless we know that we are not doing those things as we should or could*), but I am questioning what is our attitude, our motivation behind such. T V Moore wrote in his commentary on Malachi *“God will not despise the widow’s mite, but He will despise the miser’s mite - especially when the blinded man is dreaming that by his beggarly shift he is securing the favour of God.”* Some through circumstances cannot give, do, or be involved or involved more - the Lord knows such and respects that. He is not a hard task master. Yet possibly some just cannot be bothered and have excuses lined up for their comfortable, non-putting themselves out, non-sacrificial worship and service of God.

Often this can be reflected in the attitudes people have to the local church, the local representation of the body of Christ. For here our love for the Lord is to be most clearly expressed, as we meet to worship together the Lord of heaven who has saved us all.

Sadly, the priests let this contempt go on. They should have said *“No. It is not right and not acceptable!”* Regrettably they let go that

which was forbidden in God's word (Leviticus 22:18-25; Deuteronomy 15:21). It would seem everything was cosy and comfortable. The priests did not want to tread on toes. I think it was John Calvin who comments on the fact that priests lived off the offerings and if they stood up against the people, they'd stop altogether and their livelihood would be threatened and so comfortable religion and worship was security for these compromising priests.

Sadly, many pastors have not stood up for God's word because it would offend the ones who paid their wages - especially in days of patronage. Regrettably some church members have been known to threaten pastors with this. I know of a number of men, mainly in South Wales who have had to endure this. I pray I would never have to face such pressure and if I do, I pray I will stand for God and the word of God - as difficult as it would be.

The priests, in allowing such things, polluted, defiled God's worship and made it cosy, comfortable and non-demanding for those who would allegedly "draw near" to God in a non-demanding way.

Over the years I've been in the ministry, sadly I've seen trends observable in the Christian scene. Make services nonthreatening, comfortable, easy, fun etc. While I am all for making things clear and relevant, yet we still have the duty to present the awesome holy God, the God who is angry at sin and sinners and they can only be reconciled to God when they are in Christ Jesus as their Saviour. I'd rather people be disturbed and seek God, than comfortable and go to hell. My concern is that many churches are accommodating to the people rather than obeying and honouring God. What can be carried out for right motives, can end up as contempt for God.

When we meet together it is to worship God. No matter how comfortable we make a person, if they are not a Christian then they

cannot and will never be able to worship God aright while they are outside of Christ. Let's pray we will not short-change God in our worship, by offering Him any old thing, when He demands that we love Him with all our heart, soul, life and strength and we are to live to please Him by doing His ways in every area of our lives.

**B. Mindless Worship (v8-9):** they did not even apply common-sense to their worship. It was a mindless, thoughtless ritual. The Lord challenged them to offer such things to the Persian governor! They would never dare to do so! Why then would they offer such to God (v8b)? Imagine you had an important meeting with your boss - you get there late, not prepared, not paying attention, thinking about anything else other than the important business in hand, or you are half asleep and totally not following what is being said going on. Would your boss be pleased with you? I wonder how many Christians come to a church service like that! Their bosses have more honour and respect than the Lord does and we go for a comfortable cost free, mindless worship.

These priests are presented with an ironic statement and question from God in v9 - will He really answer you if you treat Him like this! Imagine you wanted a promotion, a pay rise, so invited the boss and his wife around for a meal and then served up mouldy vegetables, maggoty meat, congealed cold gravy, festering putrid pudding and then ask for your promotion or pay rise!

The priests are derided, mocked in this. Sadly, believers feel God can have any old thing, but they expect His supreme attention when they ask for help, for blessing, for this or that! Their mindless, thoughtless ritual of going through the motions of heartless hymns and songs, meaningless prayers and minds and affection on anything and everything but worship of God, underlines that fact, yet gives them 'confidence', presumption to go to God for help!!! How it is with us

as believers, with those of us who are church officers or have some role in the life of the church?

**C. Defiled Worship (v12-13):** the priests offered such things because they had a contempt for the things of God. Their very attitudes polluted and defiled all they did. Yes, they could go through the routines, say the words, perform the rituals and both people and they felt that all was ok, but God saw the motives, the thoughts, the attitudes of both the priests and the people. They polluted or despised the Lord's table - where the sacrificial animals were presented and then were taken from there for sacrifice. Perhaps the priests wanted more, were gluttons like Eli sons, perhaps they thought it chore, a bore and wanted an easy, cosy life. The KJV translates v10 so as to indicate that the priests were in it for the money and would not do anything without a payment – *“Who is there even among you that would shut the doors **for nought**? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar **for nought**.”* There was no sense of serving the awesome holy Lord, of doing good freely and willingly.

These priests viewed this service as a burden and sniffed at the things of God contemptuously – *‘turned their noses up at’* is the way we would say it! They found their work at chore and a bore. What of our service for the Lord? Is it a bind, a chore, things we turn our noses up at? We may easily find excuses, reasons why we don't go to a service, or not pray or read our Bible or maybe we do not do so with the zeal and love we once did. It is so easy to find God's service a chore, a burden. I confess there are times I'd much rather be dealing with timber than texts, with wood rather than words. I confess to my shame, I can prepare sermons *“because I have to”*, I thank God He's been gracious and dealt with me even in such. I fear becoming a *“professional sermon writer and talker”* - doing things out of routine and not out of love for the Lord and His people here. We can all be like it - we may resent having to “waste” our time in worshipping God and gathering with His people, giving to His work, or attending

or leading a youth or children's meeting, or finding our role or responsibility too much and we find that we are weary of the work and not just weary in it! To approach worship of God with such an attitude is to bring defiled, polluted worship. Should we need to, we are to examine our hearts and thoughts before the Lord.

**D. Cheating Worship (v14):** have you ever been in a fix and prayed and promised God you would do... if He helps and sorts it out? The people of Malachi's day made vows and then cheated by giving a blemished animal. They were hypocrites, cheats, they said..., but they did not do! Do we cheat God in our worship? When we consider all He's done for us, that He loves us, that He gave His Son to be our Saviour and at times it awes us, we recognise and say He deserves our all, our best and then we cheat Him in various ways. Do we seriously think He is pleased and honoured by us?

What a sorry state these priests and people were in. Yet what state are you and I in? Are we playing at honouring and fearing God? Are we showing the symptoms of the contempt disease in our lives and in our church? I am going to stop there - not because I want to end on a searching note, a sad note, but because time has gone it will do us no harm to think and pray these things through. Next time I'll get to my 3<sup>rd</sup> heading which is: **The Cause, Cure and Prevention of Contempt.** Until then may the Lord be gracious to us all and deal tenderly with us and cause us to see our lives as He sees them and to restore us if that is needed, or even bring us to Himself for the first time.