

## Ancient Truths for Modern Times – Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Compromise Malachi 2:1-9

Read drive through communion article

That's just one example of many that I've run into in the last few months

I could talk about the blessing of pets, motorcycles, flower exchange ceremonies, etc  
We live in an age of compromise among spiritual leaders

You don't have to look very far to find it – not just among pastors, but leaders throughout the church – elders, deacons, SG leaders, CM teachers

Compromise among spiritual leaders is rampant due to the pressures of society, a low view of Scripture, sin in their lives, discomfort with a hard message, or laziness

It's almost in vogue for spiritual leaders to compromise on the truth of God's Word

Whatever you want to do just as long as you're cool, people are coming, and you're giving them what they want

This passage meets that head on – it is addressed to spiritual leaders who have fallen down on the job

Before you exempt yourself, you need to consider whether you may have some God-given leadership gifts yet to be identified or developed; if you do, listen up, because this is for you

If you're in a leadership position now, or should be – listen up, because this is for you

If neither of those categories describe you, you *still* need to tune in so you can discern a true spiritual leader when you see one, and follow them as they follow Christ

Read Mal 2:1-9

It's in this passage that we find some of the standards of spiritual leadership – ancient standards for modern times

### Ancient Truth #6 – God holds spiritual leaders to high standards

Start with vs 4-5 because they are the foundation for the whole passage

There we find . . .

#### • **Spiritual leaders are chosen and empowered by God (v4-5)**

It's the only way God can reasonably expect us to live up to his high standards

Being chosen by him initially, and empowered by him continually

It's the assurance during difficult times – dryness, little fruit, strained circumstances, bad situations – that we *can* and *should* persevere

4a – *So shall you know that I have sent this command to you*

By the severe nature of the humiliation you will go through (3), you'll know it's me (God) who is reiterating this command to honor my name (2)

Doing this *that my covenant with Levi may stand* (4b)

God's covenant with Levi was that he chose him and his descendants to be priests or spiritual leaders who ran the temple, administered the sacrifices, facilitated worship, and taught the people the way of righteousness

God promises to humiliate them in order to preserve his choosing of them to be his spiritual leaders, and ensure that he is worshipped, and his people led

Keep in mind that Levi represented God's spiritual leaders then, and the standards to which they were held are indicative of God's expectations now – 1 Tim 3

Not only does God choose you as a spiritual leader, but he gives you *life* (5a) – the power, ability, and circumstances to accomplish your role

As well as *peace* – rest and contentment in your heart, despite the ups and downs of discipling others or the swirl of ministry

One of the indicators of a true spiritual leader is their response to this choosing and empowerment

God required a response of *fear* (5) – a serious and profound respect for him

*He stood in awe of my name* (5b)

If you don't stand in awe of God like the Levites old, you haven't been chosen to lead

One word for you – Quit

If you've become so cavalier and calloused toward God that there's no difference

between your attitude toward him and your neighbor next door – Get out of leadership or get it right – your doing more harm than good

That's what it means to *corrupt the covenant* (8b)

God chooses and empowers spiritual leaders, holding them to high standards of fear/awe

In addition to that . . .

#### • **Spiritual leaders should honor God in all they do (v1-3)**

*This command is for you* (1)

They weren't *giving honor to God's name* (2)

The structure of this sentence in Heb indicates that this was a habit

#### ➤ Spiritual leaders honor God by giving him the credit for all that happens

How do you feel when you do something good and you don't get the credit for it?

Or when someone else gets the credit?

It's a problem!

That's what God was addressing here

He deserves the recognition and credit for everything, everywhere

Lip service doesn't cut it, he wants us to *take it to heart* (2)

To actually believe and show that he deserves the credit for all things

It's part of honoring him in all you do as a spiritual leader

#### ➤ Spiritual leaders honor God or suffer the consequences

The consequences of not honoring God in all you do can range from a –

Diminished ability to lead; To ineffectiveness at being a blessing to others

To removal from your leadership role

All those consequences are conveyed by *the curse* (2) – refers to consequences of dishonoring God

God says – *I will curse your blessings* (2) and *I will rebuke your offspring* (3)

All the good and opportunity I have given you . . . I'm going to reverse it

And some of the consequences will be passed on to those who come after you

That's the good part

The bad part is that, not honoring God could also result in severe public humiliation –

*I will spread dung on your faces and you shall be taken away with it* (3)

You will be humiliated beyond belief, discarded like dung

*Despised and abased before all people* (9a)

That's the public part

God takes the role of leading of his people seriously – he redeemed them with the blood of his Son

Not only should spiritual leaders honor God in all they do, but they should also . . .

• **Spiritual leaders should speak the truth (v6-7)**

Spiritual leaders should speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

➤ The Truth

*True instruction was in his mouth (6)*

Deut 33:10 – Moses tells the Levites to teach the people *God's* rules and law

Not their own thoughts, words, and rules . . .

But the truth of God as found in his Word

In other words, as a spiritual leader, your own opinions/thoughts are worth nothing compared to God's thoughts as found in Scripture

Spiritual leaders should speak *the truth* of God's Word; And they should speak . . .

➤ The Whole Truth

*Show no partiality in your instruction (9b)*

This is one of the biggest downfalls of those in leadership positions – they mince words, telling one person one thing and another a different thing

As a spiritual leader, you cannot desire to please people more than God

You can't *desire* man's popularity more than God's favor

You cannot *value* the strokes of man more than the message of God

If you do, you're going to end up showing partiality and withholding the *whole truth* from someone who desperately needs it

Spiritual leaders should speak the whole truth of God's Word

➤ Nothing But The Truth

*No wrong was found on his lips (6)*

No falsehoods; Nothing contrary to God's Word; No unsavory language; No idle talk

No off-color jokes; No coarse language; No immoral comments

And when it comes to the knowledge of God . . .

*The lips of a priest should guard knowledge (7a)*

That happens as you speak nothing but the truth

It *preserves and protects* the knowledge of God

Ensures that nothing will be added or subtracted or rationalized

Spiritual leaders should speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

But it's not just what comes out of your mouth that matters . . .

• **Spiritual leaders should live right (v6b,8,9)**

They not only *know* God's instructions and teach others, but *live* by them

Do as I say, not as I do should never be a thought as a spiritual leader

*He walked with me in peace and uprightness (6b)*

Living right as a spiritual leader means . . .

You conduct your whole life in close and constant fellowship with him (walking with God)

And you do so in *peace* – no estrangement from God

And in *uprightness* – striving in God's strength to live a pure and holy life that pleases him

But God says to the leaders of Mal's day . . .

*You have turned aside from the way (8)* – way of living/relating to God and his people

*You don't keep my ways (9b)* – you don't *live* how I've told you to live, and *lead* how I told you to lead

For spiritual leaders, living and leading God's way means living *above reproach* (1 Tim 3:2)

Not just doing the right things, but doing them in such a way that others cannot legitimately make an accusation of sin against you

That's a high standard that comes not only with God's empowerment, but God's grace and mercy and protection as well

Spiritual leaders should live right, and finally . . .

• **Spiritual leaders should influence others (v6-8)**

3 Ways to Influence Others as a Spiritual Leader

1. By urging and encouraging them

*He turned many from iniquity (6b)*

We need to . . .

Urge people to repent – stop sinning and turn to God

Encourage them to live a life pleasing to God

Seek God's face as to the right balance in urging and encouraging

Don't lower the hammer without the hug

Speak the truth, but speak it in love

Truth without love usually leads to more rebellion

Love without truth usually leads to enablement

But truth with love often leads to repentance

2. By being ready

Just like the priests of old, God's leaders are messengers . . .

*He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts (7b)*

And they are sought after . . .

*People should seek instruction from his mouth (7)*

As a spiritual leader, no matter what capacity you serve in, you are recognized as someone who has been chosen and empowered by God, and therefore capable of bringing his message to bear on a situation

That means people will seek you out for instruction

So be ready!

➤ By giving biblical counsel

*You have caused many to stumble by your instruction (8b)*

When you're dealing with people's lives . . .

You can't afford to give bad counsel – their walk with Christ is on the line

Nor can you spout off with your own smooth sounding opinion that has nothing to do with God's Word – there's too much at stake

Nor can you fake it either

Just because they think you should know, doesn't mean you do, and that's okay

If you don't know what to say, just say so and pray with them

Then do your homework and get back to them

When you're dealing with people's lives, you must point them to the Word  
It is the most *powerful* means at your disposal to influence them, and it's the *only*  
perfect one  
I often find myself pleading with God for something from his Word while someone is  
telling me of an issue or problem in their life – and he often answers on the spot

I remember sitting down for the first time with a couple who wanted to get married . . .  
It became very apparent that she was a believer, albeit a new one; And he wasn't  
I laid out from the Bible, the way that he could be forgiven of his sin and come into a  
right relationship with God through faith in Christ  
He said he just didn't think he was that bad, that he was really sinful  
I prayed silently – God what Scripture? Because I knew my words were useless  
Gal 5:19-21 – Works of the flesh; Opened the Bible and had him read it out loud . . .  
Read it and stop at fits of anger – “I need God's forgiveness for that”  
As a spiritual leader, influence others by bringing the Word of God to bear in their lives

### **Summary**

God holds spiritual leaders to high standards in an age of compromise  
Live right; Speak the truth; Honor God in all you do  
And never forget that you are chosen and empowered by God