

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Prophecy of Malachi

Malachi 1:6-14

4 The Horror of Casual Worship, Part 1, The Father's Passion for Honor

July 21, 2019

Malachi 1:6-14

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. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'

7 "*You* are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.'

8 "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

9 "But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

10 "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on* My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you.

11 "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is* pure; for My name *will be* great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.

12 "But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.'

13 "You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the Lord of hosts, "and you bring what was taken by robbery and *what is* lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?" says the Lord.

14 "But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the Lord of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."

To the Glory of God

Back in 2005, I was standing in John MacArthur's church and around me were about 4,000 Pastors from all over the world. At one point in the Service we all stood and sang "*How Great Thou Art*," and I had never heard anything like that. 4,000 voices singing praises to God! It so stunned my heart that I have never forgotten that moment. Nothing had ever seemed to be so *right*, and so *beautiful*, and so profoundly *joyful* than for 4,000 of God's creatures gathered to sing together with all their heart to magnify the greatness of God.

And I really believe I got a tiny glimpse of Heaven that morning, because **The Revelation 5:11-13** gives us a glimpse of what Heaven is like when John wrote:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

The vision of Heaven is the vision of innumerable myriads of creatures *praising* the Father and the Son with all their might. And those who have tasted the Glory of the Lamb would not miss *that* for anything this world could offer them!

And that is because, before and after all things, we proclaim that the Lamb is worthy! God the Father is worthy! God the Spirit is worthy! And therefore, we *ought* to praise Them. And we *do* praise Them. And we *will* praise Them even more. And most believers have no difficulty with that Truth.

But the Bible goes further than that. 66 Books of sacred Writ tell us over and over again that God has not merely acted so He could be

worthy of praise. But God has acted to actually *“Win”* that praise, *guarantee* that praise, *cause* that praise. And that means that God does not merely wait for *us* to exalt Him, He exalts *His Own Name*.

God does not merely *wait* to be exalted because of His Power and Righteousness and Mercy; the Bible reveals that God has taken the initiative (from all Eternity) to exalt His Own Name in the earth and to display His Glory. And that means that *everything* God does is motivated by that one single Desire: to be glorified. In **Isaiah 48:11**, over 600 years *before* Jesus was born, the Prophet quoted God and wrote:

For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

The Prophet Jeremiah put it like this in **Jeremiah 13:11a**:

For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the Lord, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory...

God's Goal in all He does is to receive praise for the Glory of His Name. From the "Past Eternal Decrees of God" in Predestination to the "Future Eternal Enjoyment" of our Inheritance in the Age to come, God's Goal and Purpose has been that His Glory will be praised, *especially* the **"Glory of His Grace" (Ephesians 1:6a)**. So, there are four great Truths that motivate our Worship:

1. God is praiseworthy.
2. We *ought* to praise Him.
3. We *do* praise Him.
4. We *will* praise Him even *more*.

... and these are *common* Truths among all genuine Christians. And we affirm them gladly. But we don't hear *another* Truth very often. It is rarely mentioned that the praise of God's Glory is *not* merely the *result* of His Actions, but also the *Goal* and the *Purpose* of those Actions.

The Bible is blatant about telling us that God governs the world to the End, that He might be admired, and marveled at, and exalted, and praised. Look at **2 Thessalonians 1:10**, for example. Here the Apostle Paul wrote:

when He [Jesus] comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed —

... so, *two things* display the Second Coming. Jesus is coming back to this earth so that:

- He will be “glorified” in His saints.
- He will be “marveled at” among all who have believed.

Yet it has been my experience that when I talk about this Truth, people receive it with a degree of *uneasiness*. It is all right for *us* to praise God, because we have made the “conscious decision” to praise Him. But it just doesn’t sit well with most people for God to actually *seek* to be praised. I’m mean, after all, didn’t Jesus say:

“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”? (Matthew 23:12)

Yet, the Bible is crystal clear about this; God’s Purpose from all Eternity is to *exalt Himself* in the eyes of Man.

So, my Goal this morning is to show you, as best I can, that God’s Goal and Purpose to glorify Himself is wholly Good and without Fault of any kind, and is very *different* from “human self-exaltation” because when God does it, **it is the highest expression of His Love**.

Now as best as I can understand, there are two main Reasons why many people stumble over God’s Love for His Own Glory and His Zeal (Passion) to get sinners to praise Him for it:

- ✓ We don’t like humans who act this way.
- ✓ The Bible seems to teach that a person ought not to seek his own glory.

... so, a lot of people take offense at the Reality of God's "Self-Exaltation" because of their *own* everyday experience, and also because of some Scripture. We simply don't care for people who seem to be very enamored with themselves. We don't like "uppity" people who think they're better than us. So, from arrogant, prima-donna Politicians, who look down their noses at us, to people who never seem to tire at telling us how smart they are, we don't like people who manifest a universally distasteful quality: Self-Righteousness.

Most of us admire Humility when we see it. And we strive to be humble. We teach our children the godly "Virtue" of Humility. We usually don't try to think that "our way" is always the "best way". So, we don't like businessmen who go on and on about how shrewdly they have invested their pile of money, and how they stayed right on top of the market to buy in "low" and sell out "high" every time. We don't like children to play "one-upmanship" against each other. We disapprove of people who dress not functionally and simply and inoffensively, but instead aim to be in the latest style so they will be thought to be "cool" or "punky" or "laid back" or *whatever* the world says you're supposed to look like this week.

But why don't we like all that? I think it is because all those people are *inauthentic*. The arrogant braggards, the self-righteous condescending people are what the atheist Ayn Rand called "second handers."¹ They don't live from the normal Joy that comes through achieving what they value for its own sake. Instead, they live "second-handed" from the praise and compliments of others. And we don't usually admire those "second-handers". We admire people who are composed and secure enough that they don't feel the need to shore up

¹ Although entirely atheistic, Rand is the darling of many political Conservatives and Libertarians of our day. Among her many converts are the former Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan and Rand Paul R- Kentucky. The quote that made Ayn Rand famous is, "The man who cheats and lies, but preserves a respectable front. He knows himself to be dishonest, but others think he's honest and he derives his self-respect from that, second-hand. The man who takes credit for an achievement which is not his own, He knows himself to be mediocre, but he's great in the eyes of others. The frustrated wretch who professes love for the inferior and clings to those less endowed, in order to establish his own superiority by comparison They're second-handers They have no concern for facts, ideas, work. They're concerned only with people. They don't ask: "Is this true?" They ask: "Is this what others think is true?" Not to judge, but to repeat. Not to do, but to give the impression of doing. Not creation, but show. Not ability, but friendship. Not merit, but pull. What would happen to the world without those who do, think, work, produce? Those are the egoists. You don't think through another's brain and you don't work through another's hands. When you suspend your faculty of independent judgment, you suspend consciousness. To stop consciousness is to stop life. Second-handers have no sense of reality. Their reality is not within them, but somewhere in that space which divides one human body from another. Not an entity, but a relation—anchored to nothing. That's the emptiness I couldn't understand in people. That's what stopped me whenever I faced a committee. Men without an ego. Opinion without a rational process. Motion without brakes or motor. Power without responsibility. The second-hander acts, but the source of his actions is scattered in every other living person. It's everywhere and nowhere and you can't reason with him. He's not open to reason."

their weaknesses and compensate for their real deficiencies by trying to get as many compliments as possible.

Now, any Teaching that would seem to put God in the category of being a "second-hander" would be suspect by Christians. And for many, the Teaching that God is *seeking* praise, and *wants* to be admired, and is *doing things* for His Own Name's Sake, does, in fact, seem to put God in that category. But *should* it? One thing we may say for certain: God is not weak. And God has no deficiencies. And yet, God *seeks* us to praise Him. In fact, He *commands* us to praise and worship Him. And even more, God has promised *horrific* Damnation on those who don't.

God always was, and whatever else exists exists only because it owes its existence to Him. And that means that what has been made can add *nothing* to God, which is not already flowing out from Him. And that is simply what it means to be the "eternal God" and *not* a "created creature". Therefore, God's Zeal, His Passion to seek His Own Glory and to be praised by sinners, *cannot be* because He has a "need" or a "lack" to shore up some weakness or compensate for some deficiency. He may seem, at a superficial glance, to be in the category of a "second-hander", but God is not like them at all. And so, the superficial similarity must be explained some other way. There must be some other Motive that prompts God to seek the praise of His Glory.

But there is another Reason why we don't like those who seek their own glory. And this Reason is not merely that they are *inauthentic*, trying to conceal weakness and deficiency, but also because they are, by definition, *unloving*. Arrogant and Self-absorbed people are so concerned for their *own* image and praise that they do not care much what happens to other people. This is the stuff that Dictators are made of. And this Truth leads us to the biblical reason why it seems offensive for God to seek His Own Glory.

1 Corinthians 13:5b

[Love] does not seek its own...

Now this, indeed, seems to create a Crisis, because if the Scriptures plainly teach that God makes it His ultimate Goal to be glorified and praised, then how can God be "loving"? How can God be so radically "God-centered" and also be "loving" to me at the same time?

For God to be a God of Love, then God must be "for" me. But if God is solely "for" *Himself*, how could a God like that love *me*?

So, here is our dilemma. Last time, we saw that God began the **Book of Malachi** by telling His people:

I have loved you.

... that is the very *first* Statement from God to His people. Okay, but then in today's Passage, we find a God Who expects His people to put *Him* first, and to *not* worship Him *casually*. But which one is it? Does God love *me* or does God love *Himself*? Does God seek after what is "best" for *me* (which is *exactly* how most of us would define "Love"), or is God infinitely more concerned about what is "best" for *Himself*? How can God be focused on getting praise for *Himself* and love *me* at the same time? How does all this work?

The Answer, of course, is that God is "Holy". God is *unique*. God is *distinct* from us. God is *different* from us. God is *not* a Man. God is *God*! And so, what is true about *us* is *not* true about God. What would be a *weakness* and a *character defect* for us is a *Strength* to God. So, because God is the most glorious of all beings, and because God is totally Self-sufficient, God must be "for" *Himself in order to be "for" us*. If God were to *abandon* the Goal of His Own Self-exaltation, *we* would be the losers. So, God's Goal to bring praise to Himself, and His Goal to bring the fullness of Joy to His people, are the *same* Goal. And they both stand or fall together.

So, in view of God's infinitely admirable Beauty, Power, and Wisdom, what would His Love to His creatures look like? Or, to put it another way: What could God give us to enjoy and delight in that would *prove* that He is the most loving Being in the Universe? There is only one possible Answer: *Himself*!

If God would give us the *best*, the *most satisfying*, the *most valuable*, the *most beautiful*, the *wisest*, and the *most important* Gift (which is simply another way of loving us fully and perfectly), then He must offer us no less than *Himself* for our Hope and our Contentment and our everlasting Enjoyment. So, God *loving* us looks like God giving us both the Power and the Desire to worship *Him*! So, we really have only two Questions:

- A. *Why* do we have to worship God in order to be loved by Him?
- B. *Why* does God have to *command* our Worship?

Here is where we need to understand something about ourselves. We praise what we *love*. We praise what we *enjoy*. We praise what *brings us happiness*. We do not praise what we do not delight in. In fact, we *can't*. By definition, in order for what we do to be classified as "Praise", it **MUST** involve our *enjoyment*. And this Reality was precisely God's Intention as to why He sent us His Son. **Ephesians 2:18** says that Jesus came to us so that we might:

... have access in one Spirit to the Father.

... the Apostle Peter echoed that when he said:

1 Peter 3:18a

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God...

So, the Bible teaches that God conceived the whole Plan of Redemption "in Love" in order to bring fallen sinners back to *Himself*. So, God's Love should be understood as God, being relentless, in giving unworthy sinners that which is infinitely Best: *not* earthly prestige, *not* worldly wealth, and *not* even good physical health in this life, but God is relentless in giving us a full-blown vision of and an ever-increasing Fellowship with Himself!

But what do we do when we are given or shown something Excellent, something we enjoy? We praise it. And we don't have to be taught to do this. Praise *automatically* flows out from our lips when our minds comprehend something that brings us Joy! And that "automatic flow" of praise might be something as simple as, "*Wow!*" Or, it may be something more detailed and elaborate like:

Psalm 145:1

I will extol You, my God, O King, And I will bless Your name forever and ever.

So, for example, we praise little babies that manage not to be bent all out of shape in birth: "*Oh, look at that nice, round head, and all that*

hair, and his hands, aren't they big!" We praise our Wife's face after a long absence: *"Your eyes are like the sky, your hair is like silk, Oh, you are beautiful to me."* We praise a touchdown pass in the fourth Quarter with 16 seconds left and you're down by five points. We praise a beautiful garden that somebody put a lot of work and money into.

But it's all the same. When we "see" something that brings Joy and Pleasure and Excitement and Delight into our Minds, our hearts become enlarged, our mouths open up, our bodies get excited, and our lips begin to roll out praises! God created us to be like that! It is automatic!

So, the problem as to *why* people don't praise God lies in the fact that they do not see Him as being "Excellent". Their eyes are not able to behold God as being the most "praise-worthy" Being in the Universe. Their Minds are darkened by reason of their own deception. So, being "Lost" is *not* being able to be infinitely happy. Being lost is *not* being able to see what is most beautiful, not being able to comprehend what is most important, and not being able to embrace that which is most lovely. And that is why being "lost" is truly the most horrible place to be.

But the great Discovery I made (with the help of Jonathan Edwards) is not only that we *praise* that which we *enjoy*, but our praise is the *climax* of the Joy itself! In other words, our praise, our Worship, is *not* "tacked on" later, it is *part* of the Pleasure! We *delight* to praise what we *enjoy*, because the praise not merely *expresses* but *completes* the Enjoyment! Our praises, our Worship of God, is the appointed *Consummation* of our Delight!

For example, Husband and Wife do not keep telling each other how beautiful they are out of some "sense of duty", or because they have an "obligation" to *complement* each other, or because it is "the right thing to do". No! That's *not* Love! That's *not* Enjoyment! That's *not* Delight! The reason they speak to each other in glowing praises, even after 40 years of Marriage, is because their Delight in each other is totally *incomplete* until it is expressed! And that is the key to true, genuine Worship:

We *praise* what we *enjoy*, because the Delight is *incomplete*
until it is expressed in praise.

If we were not allowed to speak of what we value and celebrate the most, if we were *hindered* to love and praise what we admire, our Joy could *never* be full. Therefore, if God is truly “for” us, if He would give us the “Best” and make our Joy to be “full”, then He MUST make it His primary Goal to win our praise for Himself! And He MUST do that *not* because He needs to shore up some *weakness* in Himself or compensate for some *deficiency*, but because He loves us, and He seeks the *fullness* of our Joy that can only be found in knowing and praising Him the most beautiful of all beings.

So, here is what you need to know and believe: God is the only Being in all the Universe for whom seeking His *Own* Praise is the *ultimate* Act of Love. For God, “Self-exaltation” is the *highest* Virtue. When God does all things “for the praise of His Glory”, as **Ephesians 1** says, He preserves for us and offers to us the only thing in all the world which can satisfy our longings. The Bible tells us *repeatedly* that God loves us and is “for” us. But because that’s true, God is now and always will be “for” *Himself*. Praise the Lord! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

And so, that is what true, biblical Worship really is: praising and worshipping and celebrating the One Who delights your heart. Seeking to praise God out of some sense of Duty, or out of some Obligation, or even because it is “the right thing to do”, without ever *enjoying* the One we are praising, DOES NOT HONOR GOD! That is the horror of “Casual Worship”. It is going through the motions of worshipping God while your heart is totally disconnected from Him. “Causal Worship” is praising God with our lips, but not from genuinely *delighting* in Who God is.

A few hundred years before God raised up Malachi, the Prophet Isaiah put Casual Worship like this:

Isaiah 29:13b

... this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*,

... and the word “**reverence**” here is the very *same* Hebrew word that Malachi used in verse 6 to speak of their lack of “**respect**”.

So, what God is condemning is the *casual, laid-back, nonchalant, careless* attitude about Worship that people engage in Isaiah said, “**by rote**”. In other words, these people are going through their songs, and their prayers, and their offerings, because they have *memorized* them! And they know how to “go through the motions” while their hearts are not *enflamed* with Delight about the God, Who has been so Good to them. So, God issues the *second* “Divine Indictment” against His people here in **Malachi 1:6**:

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?'

In other words, those who know God as “Father” should *honor* their majestic Father. Those who have a close relationship with God and are blessed to call Him “Father” should worship as though that was *true*, and that it is *meaningful*, and that it brings them Joy. In other words, those who have been drawn near to God (by what God Himself has done for us) should worship *differently* from those who are far away from God.

God says here that *dis-connected, dis-interested, unconcerned, “casual Worship” dishonors* Him. Worshipping in a *laid back, cavalier* way, as though God has *not* gone to amazing lengths to demonstrate His Love toward us, shows God no Respect.

Now the Jews of the last 400 years of Israel’s existence before the Messiah was born worshipped God *differently* than we do today. They were commanded by God to sacrifice animals. And God went into great detail in the first five Books of the Bible to teach these Old Testament Jew what *kind* of Worship pleased Him. So, while the *first* “Divine Indictment” from Malachi had to do with God’s amazing Love, this *second* Indictment has to do with “True Worship” versus “Casual Worship”.

But again, instead of falling on their faces and repenting and crying out to God for Mercy because God was not receiving any Honor or Respect from their Worship, the Jew of Malachi’s day was bewildered that God would say these things. And so, they responded to the Almighty by asking:

How have we despised Your name?

And look at God's Response to them:

7 "You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.'

8 "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

9 "But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

10 "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on My altar!* I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you.

Dear friends, God speaks to us today through this ancient text to brand this Truth into our minds so that it stays with us and marks us off from the other peoples of the world:

Those who praise God must praise what they have come to enjoy and love. So, if God has moved in, by, and through Jesus Christ so that we now know God as our "Father", we should worship God in such a way that honors our majestic Father.

When God chooses to "set His Love" upon us before the foundation of the world, When He calls us to Himself, when He adopts us into His Family through faith in Jesus, and when God gives us the "Spirit of adoption" so that now we may call God "Father", what does God intend for us to "know", and "understand", and "believe", and "trust in", and, yes, "feel" about that? What *kind* of Response, what *type* of Worship does God desire for us to have? Is it even reasonable that we should approach God causally? How can we display God's Greatness by a Casual Worship?

The saints of Malachi's day were offering *inferior* sacrifices to God. They were giving God the animals that were defiled, and blind, and crippled, and sick. So, instead of giving God their *Best*, they were *insulting* God by giving Him their junk. And the motivation behind the inferior sacrifices was their lack of honoring and respecting God as

"Father". This is what I call "Casual Worship". It could also be called "Cheap Worship", because the sick and unholy animals would have been much cheaper than the good ones.

Now keep in mind, these people were absolutely sacrificing animals to God; they were attending the Ceremony where the priests slit the animal's throat and drained out its blood. They were there when the Priests divided up the carcass and when the priest held up the remains as a sacrifice to God.

And, according to their Law, they repeated the prayers, and they sang the Psalms, and they held up their hands, and they gave into God's Storehouse, but they did NOT do the only thing that mattered to God: They did not *love* God, they did not *enjoy* God, and they did not see God as the Treasure of the Universe. How do we know that? Because of their casual, cheap Worship. They didn't think it mattered to the Owner and Creator of the Universe that they were offering diseased animals as a sacrifice. So, God asked them a Question:

Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?"

Now in context, the "Governor" that God references here would have been the *remnants* of the Babylonian system of Government that the pagans had enforced on the Jews during their 70 years of Captivity. And God asks His chosen people if they thought that giving the pagan Governor a sick or blind or crippled animal for a sacrifice would please *him*. And then God asks them if they thought that this pagan Governor would have been pleased and received them with Kindness if they had been so casual with him.

And the point is clear, the kind of laid back, cavalier, casual Worship that they knew that a vicious, cruel, pagan Governor would never receive, these people were willing to give to God Who was their Father! In other words, the *casualness* of their Worship toward God proved that these Jews had more Honor and more Respect for a pagan Governor than they did for God.

So, what does it mean for the Lord God to be our "Father"? And the Answer is that there are at least *two* kinds of Responses that must always be kept together:

1. God, being our Father, means for us to have a “childlike Reverence” for His Strength and Wisdom and Authority, and for simply being the Source from which we came, and on which we depend minute by minute. And that means that the Honor that we give to Him is the kind of Honor that displays Him as our Father.
2. He means for us to have a “childlike Security and Peace” in His Pity, and His Provision and Care for us.

And I think that this emphasis is very different than it was 150 years ago. If you ask a typical evangelical Christian today what the term “Fatherhood of God” means to them, they would almost universally say, *“It means that God loves me, that He will take care of me and guide me and forgive me. and takes me home to live with Him forever.”*

And this is true, wonderfully true! And nothing else that I say this morning is intended to *lessen* the preciousness of that Truth. In fact, everything I say is intended to *deepen* and *sweeten* and *secure* that Truth.

But is it not striking that the primary view of this Issue always puts Man at the center? And yet, as we read the Bible, the most famous of all Biblical Commands relating to the relationship between “child and father” is the Fifth Commandment that says:

Honor your father and your mother

... and yet very few people today would even think that the “Fatherhood of God” is actually about God being honored and revered and venerated, and held in sacred respect.

And we need to wonder why this is. And I would suggest that one of the main reasons why we have lost the Biblical concept of the “Fatherhood of God” is that, for some decades now, the concept of “human fatherhood” in our Society has *not* been of a godly man whose Leadership and Authority and Wisdom and Strength *earns* the Respect and Reverence of his children. Instead, due to the *abundance* of our collective dysfunction, we have been so focused on correcting the specter of “sinful Authoritarianism”, and “cold Aloofness”, and “Male initiated Abuse”, that we have lost the central Biblical Dimension of true “Fatherhood” that commands us to “Honor” our Father!

Because the Command to us to honor our Father implies that Fathers should be *worthy* of the Honor of your children! So, God has called us men to be the kind of Father who calls forth from our children not only a "playful affection", but also a "deferential respect and honor."

The other side of this coin is that the ideal of "childlikeness" in relation to a Father has *not* included a very heavy emphasis on Reverence and Respect in our era. Three hundred years ago when Thomas Watson wrote his commentary on the Westminster Catechism, things were very different. He asked:

"How are children to show honor to their parents?"

... and he answered, with a wealth of biblical texts:

"By a reverential esteem of their persons . . . Inwardly, by fear mixed with love . . . Outwardly, both in word and gesture."

This is simply *not* the atmosphere that we breathe today. And we are all the poorer for that. "Reverential esteem" is *not* typically *demand*ed by Parents, which is *why* it is not even considered by children. And whether this is the Cause or the Result of our sinful and unbiblical view of the "Fatherhood of God", I'm not sure. I suspect that it probably works both ways: the *less* we emphasize the need for children to reverence their human Fathers, the *less* God's Fatherhood will trigger our Reverence. And the *less* God's Fatherhood wakens our Reverence and Honor for Him, the *less* we will make that part of the human ideal of Fatherhood.

But the Words of **Malachi 1:6** are the "balancing Corrective" for those who see the "Fatherhood of God" merely in terms of His "Approachability" and "Care" and "Condescension". The "Fatherhood of God" is brought in to *humble* the priests, to incite "reverential fear", precisely because they are *disrespecting* their Father's Name. They are treating His Altar and their Worship *casually*. They look at the sacred things of God as something trivial and contemptible. And so, we come to the first Conclusion: The "Fatherhood of God" in this Passage is *not* for *our* Comfort or our Security. It is given to us to *awaken* in us the Reality that if we worship God *casually*, we are *dishonoring* Him. And if we *dishonor* God, we are sinning!

The clear Teaching of a verse like this is that the majestic "Fatherhood of God" implies things that seem to be contradictory like: a "sacred Joy", a "serious Love", and a "reverential Delight". But this can be summed up by simply saying that the sinners, who have been sovereignly brought into God's Family (by the Miracle of the New Birth), must *enjoy* Who they are worshipping! And only by truly loving and valuing and marveling at God may we honor Him and respect Him and give to Him our "reverential Esteem".

I want to show you three of the ways that Malachi helps us feel the Majesty of our heavenly Father in this passage of Scripture. He begins the paragraph in verse 6 by showing us that God is our Father, and then devotes the rest of the Passage to showing the utter *inconsistency* between having God as our Father, and then treating God the way the priests were treating Him.

But notice the inconsistency that Malachi points out is *not* that they should show more Gratitude to a Father Who cares for them. Now that is certainly true. But, Malachi's point is that they should show more Honor to a Father Who is so majestic in Authority and Self-sufficiency and Universality by being determined and focused in our worship of Him.

1. By Calling God "the LORD of Hosts"

Notice that the first thing Malachi does to help us feel the Majesty of our Father in this text is to use a special Name for Him again and again. Eight times in these nine verses (24 times in the whole Book) **Malachi** calls God "the LORD of hosts."

Verse 6, ... **and if I am a master, where is my respect? says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 8, ... **will he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 9, ... **will he receive any of you kindly? says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 10, ... **I am not pleased with you. says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 11, ... **My name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 13, ... **how tiresome it is! And you disdainfully sniff at it, says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 13, ... **Should I receive from your hand? says the LORD of hosts.**

Verse 14, ... **I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts.**

Now the word "'Hosts" means: *great numbers of armies or angels or stars*. So, what Malachi wants us to see and feel is that our Father in Heaven has *infinite* Authority throughout the Universe. He can wield *any and all* armies on the earth to accomplish His Purposes among the nations, whether they know it or not. He has *myriads* of unstoppable Angels who do His Bidding, *flawlessly*, and never fail in their Errands. And God has appointed every star in the universe its position. He holds them in place, all trillion, trillion of them, and calls them all by name. And yet on the Altar of this Father, the priests are offering animals with mange and broken legs!!

2. By Showing That God Needs No Sacrifices

Second, Malachi helps us feel the Majesty of our Father by showing that He does not need these mangy sacrifices, or any others! Our ancient Father is *not* dependent on the Social Security payments of the priests. And this comes out in verse 10:

Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on My altar!*

... in other words, "*Close the Temple. I don't want the smell of your sacrifices. I don't need the food of your sacrifices!*" This is the Majesty of God's universal Ownership of all things, and His Freedom and Independence from all Creation. **Psalm 50:9-12** puts it like this:

"I shall take no young bull out of your house Nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

... or, as Paul said in **The Acts 17:25**:

nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

Our majestic Father owns every square foot of this Gulf Coast. He has total "Creator Rights" to every lake front home in Mississippi. This land is His land. From California to the New York Island. From the Red Wood forests to the Gulf Steam waters, this land was made for GOD AND THE GLORY OF HIS NAME!

And yet on the Altar of this majestic Father, the priests are offering animals with mange and broken legs!!

3. By Showing Us That God Will Be Honored by All

Finally, Malachi helps us feel the Majesty of our Father by showing us that someday God's Authority and His Ownership will be honored among every people and every tongue and every people group and every nation. Verse 11 is one of the most amazing and exciting promises in the entire Old Testament. And the RSV uses "present tense" verbs. But in the original Hebrew, there aren't any verbs except one participle that can be either present or future. The NASB is correct to see a Prophecy here and to use the "future tense", since God's NAME is not yet "Great" among the nations:

For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is* pure; for My name *will be* great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.

In other words, Malachi says to the Priests: the Name, the Reputation, the Fame of your Father which you *dishonor* with your casual worship of sick sheep and mangy goats, that Name is one day going to be revered and held in highest Esteem by every nation of the world, and in every place on the earth by all of those whom God has chosen. Should you not then honor your majestic Father?

Now let me close by applying this Truth in two ways.

1. An Application to Human Fathers

Human Fathers, alongside our dear Wives, should display a "Standard" of Truth and Righteousness and Authority and Trustworthiness mingled with Tenderness and Condescension that will

demand and *earn* from our children both “reverential Esteem” and “tender Affection”.

When my children all gather at Christmas and we sit in the living room, there are two kinds of things that I want to happen. First, I want my littlest grandchildren to climb up into my lap. I love it when little children lean their heads against my chest with a sticky, ink-stained hand reaching up to rub my cheek. Because without that “tender Affection” between me and my children, I would be a failure as a biblical Father.

But, the other thing I want is if one is misbehaving, I want to be able to simply call their name or snap my fingers, and immediately they look into my eyes, and fear comes into their hearts, and they instantly know that I am not pleased. And the Respect they have for me *causes* them to modify their behavior. And you simply can’t achieve that *casually*.

We need to understand that the happiest and holiest children in the world are the children whose Fathers succeed in winning both their “tender Affection” and their “reverential and loving Fear”. And without *both*, the children will be warped and will not understand the truest meaning of Love. And when human Fathers can affect this in our own children, they will come to understand most easily the great Mystery of the Fatherhood of God.

2. An Application to Our Relationship with God

Which leads me to the *second* Application, namely, that in our Relationship to God we should always mingle “Feelings” of Reverence and Fear and Awe on the one hand, with “Feelings” of Security and Tenderness and Friendship on the other.

One of the most remarkable things that I have been discovering recently is that these two dimensions of our Relationship to God are not only kept together in Scripture, but, in fact, the proper Experience of the one is made *dependent* on the other.

For example, **Psalm 25:14** says:

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him.

Now the word that was translated into English here as “**secret**” comes from a Hebrew word that has to do with the relationship that people have who are close friends. So, the “secret” that David was talking about here is a close “friendship”.

But isn't it strange that God would say that the “friendship” of the Lord is with them that fear Him? How does “fear” produce “friendship”? Doesn't close friendship usually *eliminate* fear?

Yes, if we were talking about other people. But David is talking about God. And so, while a close and joyful Friendship with God DOES eliminate “*cowering Fear*” and “*paralyzing Fear*” and “*guilt-laden Fear*”, it DOES NOT cast out “*reverential Fear*”. David taught here that this “*reverential Fear*” actually *promotes* Friendship or Closeness or Intimacy with God. Another example is **Isaiah 66:2b**:

... to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Do we want God to “look” at us? Do we want the “Eyes of God” to “see” us? Do we want the “Face of the Lord” to “shine” upon us? Do we desire for God to lift up “His Countenance” upon us and “smile” with Warmth and Tenderness? Sure. Well, this verse tells you *how* that happens. We must be humble, we must be contrite of spirit, and we must tremble at God's Word.

So, God's “secret”, His Friendship, is only for those who “*reverentially*” fear Him. And His Countenance is only for those who are blessed to *tremble* at what God has said. And this is the exact *opposite* of being casual in our Worship.

So, who among us will discover and know the “Secret” of God? Who is it that will rest in God's Mercy, who will frolic in the Ocean of God's Compassion? Those who refuse to be casual with God and who will bow with “*reverential Fear*” and honor their majestic Father.

So, may we never be cowering or dumbfounded or paralyzed with our God. But while we pray for that, let us also pray that God would save us from being flippant or casual or trifling or presumptuous in the Presence of our majestic Father. But may we discover, in the Power of the Holy Spirit, and through God's Word, the “Mystery of Godliness” that can be described as a series of contrasts:

- ✓ a "bold Brokenness"
- ✓ a "reverential Relaxation"
- ✓ a "fearing Familiarity"
- ✓ a "trembling Tenderness"
- ✓ an "affectionate Awe"

The Mercy of God is one of the most precious Realities in the world, one of the most revealing Themes in all the Bible, and one of the most tragically misunderstood Truths about God. If you want to know Who God really is, if you want to peek into His Heart, it is not the display of His Just Wrath and Omnipotent Power to which you should look. Rather, set your eye on God's Mercy while never minimizing the fullness of His Might, and take in the "life-changing Panorama" of our great King.

But if we are to understand and savor the Mercy of God, we CANNOT do it by being careless or casual in our Worship. We must worship God *intentionally, deliberately*, with forethought and reason, or else Mercy will soon disintegrate into nothing but Leniency.

Thanks be to God that we do not have to sacrifice animals anymore. But even though we have been delivered from all the intricacies of Worship that was required of the ancient Jew, we need to keep one thing that they had. Preparation. The Jew had to *prepare* themselves to worship the Lord. And their preparation had to do with external washings and sacrifices and refraining from intimacy with wives. We must NOT do that. But what we SHOULD do is prepare our hearts and minds BEFORE we enter into His Presence so that our Worship will be deliberate, and filled with Wonder and Joy and Awe, and will not be casual or careless.

Our God is not simply sovereign and wonderful. He is not only a God of uncompromising Justice. The God we serve is also the Mercy-giving God, Who invites us to look not only at His awesome Authority and sovereign Strength, but to set our eyes on His Beauty, and His Sweetness, and His Mercy, and then love what we see. And when that happens, God will be honored by our Worship.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.