

Guarding Holy Things

Malachi 2:1–9

Opening Frame: God Speaks Plainly Because His Household Is Holy

God speaks severely in Malachi because He is near His household. He is not criticizing from a distance. He is Father and Lord of the house. The priests were entrusted with His name, His worship, His altar, His instruction, and His people.

When the people stumble, God does not only ask, “*What is wrong with the people?*” He also asks, “*Who taught them? Who led them? Who guarded the way? Who allowed holy things to become common?*” In Christ, we have been brought into the fulfilled household of God. This is not distant history.

Point 1: Offering Reveals Relationship

Text focus: Genesis 4; Malachi 1:6–14 (Mark’s Sermon)

God did not demand an offering from Cain and Abel. There is no command in the text. There is no divine requirement that precedes the action. Something rises from within them an innate recognition of gift and Giver. They know they have received. They know there is One to whom return is owed. So they bring.

Offerings do not begin in Malachi. They begin in the human response to God’s gift. God gives. Man receives. Man offers back. This is not first a rule. *It is a dialogue of love.* A movement from gift to gratitude, from receiving to returning.

“The offering reveals the offerer. The shape of our offering becomes a mirror of the relationship we have with the One we offer to.”

If we read Cain and Abel typologically, Cain and Abel show us the pattern: Abel offers rightly because Abel sees rightly. He sees God as God the Giver of life, worthy of the first and the best. The offering is an overflow of right vision. But Cain’s offering is wrong not first because of the material. It is wrong because of what it reveals about the one who brings it. The inner eye is already darkened. Cain cannot see God rightly. He cannot see the gift rightly. And as that darkened vision spreads, he cannot see his brother rightly.

God does not merely critique the material of Cain’s offering. He exposes what the offering reveals about Cain. “*Sin is crouching at the door.*”

The offering has become diagnostic.

Notice the order:

- * Cain offers wrongly.
- * Cain loves wrongly.
- * Cain kills his brother.

“Wrong offering reveals wrong love. Wrong love becomes wrong action. Wrong action becomes death.”

Right offering orders love back to God, the Source of life. And when love is rightly ordered toward God, it begins to be rightly ordered toward the brother who also receives life from God. False offering does the opposite. It disorders love by forming the heart around a false vision of God.

That is why Malachi’s polluted sacrifices are so dangerous. The lame, the blind, and the sick offerings are not merely poor-quality gifts; they preach a lie about God. They say He is common, worth leftovers, and approachable on casual terms. A false offering does not change God. It reveals the false god already forming in the imagination of the worshiper. And once God is mis-seen, the brother will be mis-seen too.

Point 2: God Teaches His People How to Draw Near

Do not think of the God of the Old Testament as harsh and the God of the New Testament as kind. That framing is a distortion.

More than that: to begin reading the Old Testament that way is to start thinking about how God taught His people as though He were acting like the pagan gods—as though He required appeasement by force, demanded blood out of cruelty, and kept people at a distance because He was dangerous and arbitrary. That is not who this God is.

The God who speaks in Malachi is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is one God, one household, one story fulfilled in Christ.

Christ does not arrive to rescue us from the Father. Christ reveals the Father. Christ does not abolish the holiness of God. He brings us into it. Christ does not undo priesthood. He fulfills priesthood as the better High Priest.

Here is the problem we must understand. If the nous, the mind, the inner eye, is darkened, sincerity is not enough. A person can sincerely offer wrongly. Sincerity with a darkened nous can still destroy the brother. So God teaches His people how to see again. He gives priests, prophets, teachers, Law, tabernacle, and sacrifice, not to burden them, but to form in them a right vision of who He is and how He may be approached. We need teachers and pastors to help us as we become enlightened.

But at the base of the mountain, Aaron shows the danger. He makes the calf and calls it a feast to the Lord. He does not say, “Let us stop worshipping.” That is what makes it so dangerous, worship language bent into the shape of Egypt. The vocabulary of holiness bent toward a false god.

Malachi is noticing the same drift. The altar is active. The priests are functioning. But holy fear is gone.

Point 3: Malachi Exposes the Priestly Failure

Text focus: Malachi 2:1–3

“And now, O priests, this command is for you.”

“If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name...”

“I will curse your blessings.”

“I will spread dung on your faces.”

“The issue begins in the heart before it appears in the offering. The priests still had the office, the altar, the vocabulary, the sacrifices. But they did not take the name of the Lord to heart.”

That is where corruption begins. Not first with scandal. Not first with public collapse.

When worship becomes routine.

When Scripture becomes material.

When prayer becomes performance.

When authority becomes self-protection.

When holy office is severed from holy fear, even blessing becomes cursed. The very things meant to bless became corrupt because the priests were corrupt.

The “dung” imagery is exposure: God exposes on their faces what they tolerated at the altar. The hidden contempt becomes visible. The casualness they normalized becomes shame.

This is mercy if we receive it. Because one of the worst things God can do is allow us to continue comfortably in deception.

Exposure leads to repentance. But if we refuse repentance, exposure becomes judgment.

Point 4: The Faithful Priest Guards Life and Peace

Text focus: Malachi 2:4–7

“My covenant with him was one of life and peace... It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name.”

“True instruction was in his mouth... He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.”

“For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge... for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

Life and peace that was the goal of priesthood. But notice what guards life and peace: fear. Not slavish terror. Holy fear means reverence, the settled refusal to treat God as common.

“This is one of the great lies of our age: that reverence is somehow opposed to joy.”

If you treat marriage casually, you do not get more joy. You destroy it. If you treat worship casually, your soul becomes bored with God. Holy fear protects joy because it keeps things in their proper order.

The faithful priest has:

- * Holy fear: he stands in awe of God’s name.
- * True instruction: he does not invent or manipulate the truth.
- * Integrity of life: he walks with God in peace and uprightness.
- * Fruitful correction: he turns many from iniquity.
- * Guarded speech: his lips guard knowledge.

“The faithful priest does not merely know holy things. He guards them. He does not guard them to keep people away from God forever. He guards them so the people may come near rightly.”

Text focus: Malachi 2:8–9

“You have turned aside from the way.”

“You have caused many to stumble by your instruction.”

“You show partiality in your instruction.”

“The danger is not only that leaders personally sin. The danger is that leaders multiply stumbling.”

Pastors, our sermons have consequences.

Fathers, our words have consequences.

Teachers, our lessons have consequences.

Partiality in instruction means handling truth selectively. Being clear when it costs someone else, vague when it costs you. Strict with the weak, lenient with the powerful. Hard on your children’s disrespect, silent about your own anger. The honor leaders try to preserve by compromise is the very honor they lose.

Point 5: Christ Restores the Offerer

If Malachi only exposes failed priests, failed pastors, and failed fathers, it crushes us. But Malachi also creates longing for the faithful priest and that faithful priest is Christ.

The priests failed to take God’s name to heart.

Christ perfectly honors the Father.

They corrupted instruction.

Christ is the Word made flesh.

They offered polluted sacrifices.

Christ offers Himself without blemish.
They caused many to stumble.
Christ lifts the fallen.
They corrupted the covenant of life and peace.
Christ becomes our life and peace.

His offering as man is the good one, the offering Adam never gave, the offering Cain refused to give. Abel offered the first and best from the flock; Christ offers Himself, the true and perfect offering. He is the one who sees rightly, loves rightly, and offers rightly. And as Priest, the access He gives does not merely forgive bad offerings. It purifies the nous the inner eye, the conscience. He restores the capacity to see: to see God rightly, to see the gift rightly, to see the brother rightly.

He does not only forgive bad offerings. He restores the offerer. He purifies the conscience. He heals the inner eye. He teaches us to see again.

Then the torn veil:

“The torn veil does not mean holy things became common. It means the true High Priest has entered. The Holy of Holies was not opened so holiness could be trampled underfoot. It was opened because Christ entered by His own blood and brings His people near.”

***The gospel does not make holy things common.
The gospel makes common people holy.***

Christ does not lower holiness down to our brokenness. He raises broken humanity into holiness. We come with confidence because Christ opened the way. We come with reverence because the way He opened is holy.

Point 6: Under Christ, Guard the Holy

Christ is the High Priest and Son over the Father’s house. Under Him, pastors are entrusted with holy things in the Church:

The Word is holy.
Worship is holy.
The sacraments are holy.
Prayer is holy.
The people of God are holy.
The care of souls is holy.

The pastor’s calling is not to keep people away from God. It is to usher them into holiness through Christ. Guard the Word. Guard worship. Guard the Table. Guard against false teaching.

Then fathers.
The home is not spiritually neutral.
Marriage is holy.
Children are holy gifts.
Prayer is holy.
Scripture is holy.
Sunday worship is holy.
The name of the Lord spoken in the home is holy.

“Your home has a liturgy (shape worship takes). Repeated words, repeated habits, repeated screens, repeated meals, repeated conflicts, repeated reconciliations. Those repetitions are forming your household. The question is not, “Am I forming my family?” You are. The question is: toward what?”

Christlike headship is cruciform. A faithful father does not say: “I am in charge, so serve me.” He says: “Christ is Lord, so I will serve first.”

“I will repent first. I will pray first. I will lead us to worship.”

Authority without holiness is dangerous. Priestly authority without reverence becomes corruption. Fatherly authority without reverence becomes domination or negligence. A man can want headship without holiness. But Christ will not separate headship from self-offering.

Conclusion: Guard the Holy So People May Enter Life and Peace
“My covenant with him was one of life and peace.”

That is the goal. Holiness is not the enemy of life and peace. Holiness is the condition of true life and peace.

Listen. Take it to heart. Honor His name. Do not treat holy things casually. Do not call common what God has made holy. Do not lead without repentance. Do not forget what you were made for.

Come to Christ, the faithful High Priest. Come with repentance. Come with reverence. Come with confidence. He forgives. He cleanses. He sanctifies. He makes common people holy.

Final anchor:
Guard the holy.
Protect the people.
Teach the way.
Lead them near.
For we were made for holiness, and in Christ God brings us into life and peace.

Small Group Bible Study Guide | Malachi 2:1-9

Main Idea: God is holy, Christ the faithful High Priest opens the way into holiness, and those who lead under Him are called to guard holy things, protect the people, teach the way, and lead them near.

Read aloud: Malachi 2:1-9.

Then ask: What happens when people entrusted with holy things stop treating them as holy?

1. Offering Reveals Relationship

God gives; humanity receives; humanity offers back. Offering is a dialogue of love, and it reveals how we see God. Cain, Abel, and Malachi show that wrong offering reveals wrong love.

Question: What do my offerings - time, attention, worship, money, obedience - reveal about my relationship with God?

2. God Teaches His People How to Draw Near

God gave priests, prophets, Law, sacrifice, and worship not to burden His people, but to teach them how to approach Him rightly. Sincerity is not enough if the heart is darkened.

Question: Where do I need God to retrain my instincts about worship, reverence, and obedience?

3. The Priests Failed to Take God's Name to Heart

They still had office, altar, vocabulary, and religious activity, but they no longer listened or took God's name to heart. Corruption often begins before public scandal - when holy things become routine.

Question: Where have I kept religious activity while losing reverence?

4. Holy Fear Guards Life and Peace

Malachi says the faithful covenant was one of life and peace, guarded by holy fear. Holy fear is not terror; it is reverence, awe, and the settled refusal to treat God as common.

Question: How could reverence deepen my joy rather than diminish it?

5. The Faithful Priest Guards Knowledge

The faithful priest has true instruction, upright life, guarded speech, and fruitful correction. He guards holy things not to keep people away, but so they may come near rightly.

Question: How can my words either guard the way to life or cause others to stumble?

6. Christ Restores the Offerer

Christ is the faithful High Priest. He does not merely forgive bad offerings; He restores the offerer. The torn veil does not make holy things common; it reveals that Christ brings common people into holiness.

Question: Where do I need Christ to heal my sight, reorder my love, and make me holy?

Personal Application

Take it to heart: What holy thing has God entrusted to me right now - in worship, family, speech, leadership, or daily habits? What would repentance and faithful guarding look like this week?

Guard the holy. Protect the people. Teach the way. Lead them near.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, faithful High Priest, forgive our casualness, restore holy fear, purify our sight, and make us holy. Teach us to guard what is holy so others may enter Your life and peace. Amen.