

Hypocrites of Holiness

2:10-13

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“Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, may the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the Lord of hosts. And this is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand” (2:10-13).

The shops in the square of San Marcos were all closed in honor of a high religious festival day. A group of tourists were disappointed because it was their last day, and they wanted to buy souvenirs of lovely Venice. But their regret soon vanished. As they looked at the store, they saw customers inside. They stepped around to a side door and gained entrance. The shop owners were keeping the front doors closed because of the religious holiday, but the side doors were opened for business as usual! This is how many obey God. To the eye there is strict observance, but the divine precepts are violated in the heart. The shutters are closed and the front door locked. It appears as if the person will no longer deal with Satan, but a brisk com-

merce is going on because the “side door” has been left opened!

Malachi 2:10-13 gives us a good taste of the prophet’s message. The words are “hard-hitting,” “finger-pointing,” and “toe-stomping.” I am sure Malachi was accused of “meddling” in Israel’s private affairs soon after he spoke these words. But, regardless of his critics’ accusations, his charges were true. He had just exposed the religious leaders of failure and faithlessness. Now he turns to those in the general population. The number one charge is hypocrisy! “Treacherously” (2:10) refers to a deceptive practice. It is a catchword describing the base double-mind of the Israelites. Malachi looked at a nation that had been engulfed in hypocrisy. But the nation failed to understand its tragic plight.

Throughout Scripture, the hypocrite is described in terms which reveal him as the object of God’s greatest anger. For example, we read, “Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, but inwardly he sets an ambush for him. Shall I not punish them for these things?” declares the Lord. . . .” (Jeremiah 9:8, 9); “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!” (Proverbs 21:27). To the Romans, Paul’s words reveal the wrath that will confront the hypocrite: “You are without excuse” (Romans 2:1; cf. Job 8:13-15; Isaiah 9:17; 29:15; Ezekiel 20:39; Amos 5:21-27).

Consider the solemnity of God's judgment upon the evil practice of hypocrisy in 2:10-13. Malachi spoke to the erring nation of the fatal consequences of hypocrisy.

FOUR FACETS OF HYPOCRISY

Malachi brought four specific points to Israel's attention. Each point addressed one of the tragic aspects of hypocrisy.

First, their pretense masked a grave failing of spiritual understanding (2:10-13). Malachi says that "treacherous" acts are being committed. Literally, this refers to a deception practiced by acting one way and then doing the opposite. Today we refer to such as "two-faced" because a person wears one face in someone's presence while in reality he is wearing a totally different one (cf. Jeremiah 9:8).

This has long been practiced. Julius Caesar, for example, was hypocritical. He would appear to be pleased with his friends while seeking their absolute ruin at the same time. Cicero was banished from Rome by this pretense. Pompey was rendered odious to the nation. When Caesar's troops pursued Pompey to Egypt and there executed him, they brought his head back to Caesar. When Caesar saw Pompey's head, he shed tears as he said, "It is the victory and not the revenge that pleases me." But all of Rome knew of Caesar's hypocrisy. Charles IX of France, a little before the massacre of St. Bartholomew, invited Admiral Coligni to his palace. The admiral came because the king had said he desired counsel from him and would abide by the admiral's decision. The king greeted the admiral with the reverence of a father for a beloved son. Yet, shortly afterwards the king caused the admiral to be humiliated and put to death!

This "treachery," which comes with hypocrisy, was being practiced in Israel. The temple's activities were being observed religiously. The offerings were being made daily. The covenant with Jehovah was a source of national pride. But it was all a sham! Men were bringing sacrifices and offering prayers, and at the same time their wives were weeping, praying, and begging for vindication from their husbands' treachery (2:13).

Such pretense is well described by Paul, "For men will be . . . treacherous, . . . holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:2-5; cf. Titus 1:16). How

tragic to think that Christians today can fall prey to this snare of Satan! Many have become captives to the bondage of hypocrisy. Let all beware of this pretense as described by Malachi.

Second, their practice destroyed holiness (2:10, 11). The pretense of Israel's hypocrisy was revealed in two ways: by the treacherous acts and the profane treatment shown to spiritual objects. The treachery had seeped into their hearts and directed their lives. They even dealt treacherously with their wives. Instead of honoring the marriage covenant, they discarded their wives (2:14). Marriage with non-Israelites was forbidden by the law (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3; 1 Kings 11:1, 2), but hypocrisy had corrupted obedience to the law. Israel was a holy nation, but hypocrisy had led them to practice abominations! Thus God's holiness was profaned.

This corruption occurs today as well. Those who "pretend" to follow God, but whose hearts are controlled by the evil of hypocrisy, will follow the abominable course of ancient Israel (cf. Ezekiel 5:11; 20:39).

Our Lord confronted certain religious leaders with this same charge. Their "pretended" religion and hypocrisy led them to destroy holiness (Matthew 23:13). May we be careful so we will not follow the same tragic course.

Third, their punishment awaited (2:11-13). Centuries ago, Malachi urged Israel to learn the consequences of "sowing to the flesh" (Galatians 6:7). The Israelites had allowed hypocrisy to deceive them and control their practices. Such destined the nation for punishment.

Malachi spoke of three punishments which awaited Israel. First, their offering would be an abomination unto God (2:11). Any sacrifice which they brought would be the worst thing they could do to God. Their worship would be repulsive to Him (cf. Isaiah 29:13; Hosea 11:12). Second, Israel would be "cut off" (2:12). This refers to them being deprived of the covenant's blessings. Utter extermination would take place, and it would be as if they never lived. Israel would lose their heritage as the holy nation of Jehovah. This was no idle threat, and Israel could not ignore it (cf. Job 27:8, 9; 36:14; John 15:2, 6; Philippians 3:19). Third, Israel's double-mindedness would have to answer to God's wrath (2:13).

Wicked conduct always raises a barrier between man and God. This barrier prevents God's favor from being shown (cf. Job 36:13; Isaiah 9:17; Matthew 6:5, 16; 7:15, 23; Luke 20:47b).

Malachi's words were to the point. If Israel continued in hypocrisy, they would face a dreaded punishment which no one could withstand! To the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, this tragic punishment was also promised: "Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation" (Matthew 23:14b). Let us take heed and not allow hypocrisy to lead us toward this punishment.

Fourth, their position was illogical and absurd (2:10). Malachi began with a series of questions that revealed the ridiculousness of hypocrisy. The Israelite who was a hypocrite could never answer Malachi's questions because it would reveal that his pretense was inexcusable (cf. Romans 2:1).

"Inexcusable" is God's conclusion regarding those who pretend holiness but practice hypocrisy. They are like ancient Israel whose double-mindedness illustrates the behavior of hypocrisy (cf. Psalms 78:34-37; Hosea 7:14, 16). As God's children, Israel should have guarded their practice, but they did not. They were in a position of honor and respect. But they assumed a position that was illogical and absurd which is the only position which a hypocrite will reach.

While it is amazing that Israel would practice a pretended religion that would lead them to such a position, is it any different with some today? Some fail to honor their positions as "heirs of God" as they cheat, lie, hate, or oppress. Evil behavior has no business in the lives of God's children (cf. 1 Peter 4:15). Such reprobate actions cause Christians to assume a position that Israel occupied—one that is illogical and absurd!

FOUR LESSONS REGARDING HYPOCRISY

Let us notice some lessons regarding hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a subtle threat and a deadly practice! Listen to Malachi. He calls it an "abomination." This is placing hypocrisy in the same category as idolatry, witchcraft, and many other heinous sins. Those who practice a pretense of religious devotion will neutralize the power of God's church! We must remember this and not

be lulled into a complacent attitude about hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is defined by God as "inexcusable" (Romans 2:1). There is *no* excuse that can justify it. The only appropriate response is to admit it and repent!

Hypocrisy is never covered for long. Eventually, the hypocrite will be exposed. On Judgment Day, *all* acts, thoughts, and motives will become known (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Hypocrisy is never totally shunned until one makes a firm decision to deny self and follow God (Luke 9:23). Hypocrisy is so appealing because we allow selfishness to compromise our dedication to God's will. If we deny selfishness, we will defeat the temptation of hypocrisy.

CONCLUSION

Malachi's message is applicable today in unmistakable terms. There will always be those who live the life of the hypocrite. They are wedded to the world but desire to follow God. They go through life "pretending" to be religious and never heed Malachi's blunt message to Israel. They fail to realize that hypocrisy masks a desire to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24), destroys holiness, promises a harsh punishment, and places them in a position that is illogical and absurd.

Hypocrites still plague the church. Christ's call to the hypocrite could not be clearer: "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). As followers of God, we must direct our lives by "heavenly wisdom" which is "without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). Failure to shun hypocrisy carries a cost that is too great for any believer to pay.

One of Aesop's fables portrays the fate of the hypocrite. A wolf resolved to disguise himself as a sheep thinking he would have an easier livelihood. He clothed himself in a sheep's skin and contrived to get among the flock. He succeeded, and even the shepherd was fooled. The wolf was shut up with the sheep, and the door was made fast. But the shepherd, wanting meat for supper, went to fetch a sheep. He mistook the wolf for a sheep and killed him on the spot!

Malachi's message is simple: "Hypocrites of holiness have no abiding peace; they only have eternal regret!"

—John Kachelman

The Universal Father
(Malachi 2:10)

1. As such God should be universally acknowledged (Ephesians 3:14).
2. As such God deserves the universal praise
3. As such God possesses universal sovereignty (Psalm 50).
4. As such God's pain is great over a universe that has followed another and forsaken its rightful Father (Ephesians 6:12; John 8:44).

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