# THE LORD'S INDICTMENT AGAINST HIS PEOPLE: DISHONOURING GOD'S NAME
## Malachi 01:06 – 02:09

### *Introduction*

One of the essentials to grasping our purpose in life is to understand God's great love. This understanding must be more than a vague concept of God's love for all people. Rather, each one of us must have a deep-seated experience of God's love. We must realize that God loves and deeply cares for us individually, that He wants only the best for each person. For that reason, God cares immeasurably about what we do and how we live. It is this fundamental knowledge that makes a believer strong.

The opposite is also true. If we doubt God's love, His care and concern, we will be greatly weakened. We may even fall prey to the false notion that God cares little about what we do, whether we live for Him or not. To doubt God's love is to doubt His Word, for God's Holy Word clearly states that God loves us. Scripture teaches this wonderful truth in no uncertain terms, as seen in the passage before us. The opening chapter of Malachi states emphatically that God loves His people. Moreover, He has proven His love time and again and in countless ways. Malachi goes even further to spell out the devastating results of doubting God's love. The prophet describes how quickly doubt spins out of control. When it does, it leads to disobedience, and disobedience brings dishonour to God's Holy Name. This is the critical message of the passage before us, *Charges One and Two: Doubting God's Love and Dishonouring God's Name*, Malachi 1:1-2:9.

I. Charge 1: doubting God's love, (vv. 1:1-5)

II. Charge 2: dishonouring God's name, (vv. l:6-2:9)

### *Malachi 01:06 – 2:09 The Charge: Israel Dishonoured the Name of God*

The second charge God made against His people was that they were dishonouring His Name. God's Name represents His character and reputation; therefore, the people were bringing dishonour to the Lord's reputation by their behaviour. Remember, the Lord had just stated that Israel would one day praise Him and even declare His greatness beyond their borders (v. 5). Now, however, the people were dishonouring Him. This was especially true of the priests. Therefore, these indictments are chiefly aimed at them. They, above all, were supposed to honour and obey the Lord, teaching God's law and leading the people in God's ways. But they were failing miserably in their responsibilities, actually leading the people astray.

1. The Lord's complaint shows that His heart was broken over the people's attitude toward Him (vv. 6a-6c). He gave three specific examples to show the people how much they had dishonoured Him:

a. God was their Father, yet they did not honour Him (v. 6a). The Israelites were the children of God — His chosen and beloved people. The LORD had been a true father to them — guiding, protecting and caring for them. For this reason, the LORD spoke to them as their Father and asked them a very pointed question: "If I am your father, where is the honour due me?" The Israelites were very familiar with the commandment that children should honour their parents (Exo 20:12; Deut 5:16). They also knew that children who refused all attempts at discipline were to be stoned (Deut 21:18-21). This commandment proved just how serious the LORD considered their behaviour to be: outright rebellion and dishonouring one's parents were crimes against God's established authority, a capital offense punishable by death. If earthly parents were due such respect, how much more was the LORD, the Father of all?

b. God was their Master, yet they did not respect or fear Him (v. 6b). Of even greater significance was the fact that God is the Master of all people, for He has created the human race and every other living thing. The LORD was especially Master of His people Israel, for He had called them to be His servants. His people were supposed to serve Him by worshipping Him sincerely and obeying His Word. They were to live as He had created the human race to live, in harmony with Himself and with one another. By serving Him this way, Israel would be a light to all nations. Through them, He could send the Saviour and His Holy Word to the world. The LORD had provided for their every need. He had sheltered them as an earthly master shelters and cares for those who serve him. In spite of this, the Israelites had not given the LORD the respect that even an earthly master receives. The LORD then justifiably confronted them with the question, "If I am your Master, where is the respect due me?" The question was stinging because Israel knew very well that they owed the LORD their supreme respect and allegiance, that they were to both love and fear Him (see Deut 6:5; 6:13). But their actions had betrayed them; they neither loved nor honoured Him — not as they should.

c. God accused the priests of showing contempt for Him (v. 6c). At the end of this verse, the LORD made it clear that He was chiefly indicting the priests. It was the priests' duty to instruct and lead the people in God's ways, to teach them what it meant to serve and honour the LORD. This had always been the case; and it was all the more important now because the people had gone into exile and forgotten the Word of the LORD — all His commandments and instructions. After the exile, the priests were given the crucial role of re-educating the people in the ways of God (see Ezr 6:16-22; 7:10; Neh 9:38-10:39). But the priests themselves were dishonouring and disrespecting the LORD's Name. Their behaviour showed contempt for the LORD and His law. When the LORD challenged them, the priests responded as the people had earlier: they provokingly asked the LORD to explain how He had loved them.

***Thought 1.*** Dishonouring the Lord's Name is a serious offense and, sadly, it is an extremely common one. To our shame, it is almost as common among believers as it is among unbelievers, even if for different reasons. We dishonour the LORD's Name whenever we...

- fail to give Him the respect, honour, and praise He deserves
- fail to worship and praise Him in our daily lives
- fail to live for Him
- fail to trust and obey His Word — His instructions and commandments
- fail to commit our time, money and other resources to His kingdom and work
- fail to love others — through action as well as words
- fail to believe His promises
- doubt His love

In addition to the above sins of omission, we also dishonour God's Name when we curse Him or use His Name irreverently or lightly. The list of ways we dishonour God's Name is endless, but God's response to our lack of respect for His Name is singular:

***Exo 20:7*** *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."*

2. The priests now provoked the LORD further by asking how they had dishonoured Him (v. 6d). This reckless question showed just how indifferent the priests were to their sins. Nevertheless, the LORD responded to the priests and clearly spelled out how they were dishonouring Him.

3. God gave the people five specific proofs or examples of their disrespect for Him, ways in which they were dishonouring His Holy Name (vv. 7-14).

a. The people and priests were defiling the LORD's altar by offering imperfect or blemished sacrifices (vv. 7-9). These were most likely the animals used in burnt offerings to atone for the people's sins.

=> Rather than bringing the best of their flocks, healthy and strong animals, the people brought blind, crippled and diseased animals for sacrifice (v. 8a). This was a direct violation of God's commandments (see Lev 22:2, 17-33; Deut 15:19-23). The people were offering animals they themselves did not want. They were actually using the holy system of sacrifices to clean out diseased and undesirable animals from their herds. Such a greedy practice was not only dishonouring to the LORD, but it was essentially robbing Him of what was rightfully His. Ironically, considering that these sacrifices were meant to atone for their own sins, the people were also robbing themselves. Such blemished sacrifices could never atone for their sins. What they were doing was heaping sin upon sin. The priests were then accepting these flawed animals as if God's law did not exist. They certainly knew the law, but

they apparently did not care. Perhaps they rationalized that God would accept the sacrifices because the people were poor and struggling to make ends meet. This was a shameful mockery of the very sacrificial system meant to give the people life.

The people were supposed to offer the very best animals from their flocks in recognition of the blessings of God. This would also demonstrate trust in God, who provided for their every need. Offering unblemished animals was a way of acknowledging that only a perfect sacrifice could atone for their sin. It was also a symbol or foreshadowing of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah. The LORD required perfect animals to further teach the people that He was holy. A holy and perfect God deserved the best the people could provide — nothing less.

=> In light of the people's defective offerings, the LORD asked them another pointed question: "Would their governor be pleased with such flawed gifts?" (v. 8b). This question should have burdened the people's hearts. The Israelites would never have thought of offering such lame and sickly animals to their earthly governors or rulers. Yet, they dared to offer these to the LORD Almighty — the LORD of Hosts, Ruler of all the earth.

=> The people should ask themselves how they could expect God to hear their cry for mercy when they presented such imperfect offerings (v. 9). Given the people's gross irreverence, their callous and careless attitude, how could they even conceive of asking God to answer their prayers? Nonetheless, the people were so insensitive to their crimes against God that they still cried to the LORD for mercy whenever they got into trouble. They expected Him to accept their defiled offerings and dared to ask Him for grace. This was not only ignorant but also highly offensive to the LORD.

b. The people ignored God's holy nature, that He would long for the temple doors to be shut (v. 10). In essence, God had had enough. He would rather have no sacrifices than the despised sacrifices the people were offering. It would be better for the people to have no religious practices than the hypocritical and half-hearted religion they were participating in. Thus, the LORD told the people in no uncertain terms that...

   - their worship was useless and unpleasing to Him. With such defective offerings, it was useless even to light the fires on the altars of sacrifice.
   - their offerings were totally unacceptable to Him. With such defective offerings, He would accept nothing from their hands. The implication was that He would neither accept them personally nor hear their prayers.

c. The people ignored the prophecies dealing with God's Name, that His Name would be honoured among all nations. This is a clear reference to the Messiah's coming kingdom (v. 11). Verse eleven provides the sharp contrast needed to jolt the people awake. They needed to realize with whom they were actually dealing. They had been offering their best animals to governors and rulers whom they could see, and offering

their despised and unwanted animals to the LORD whom they could not see. Perhaps because they could not see the LORD with their physical eyes, they thought He did not see them or what they did. Or, perhaps because they could not communicate with the LORD face to face as they did their own earthly fathers and masters, they thought He was not as real nor did not care about what they did. Regardless of what they thought, the LORD was real and cared very much about what they did. The LORD therefore proclaimed two great truths about Himself — truths the people already knew but which they sorely needed to be reminded about. These truths spoke of the future, when all people and all nations will know the LORD and honour Him. They painted a picture of the Messiah's coming kingdom, a day when...

- the LORD will be honoured all day long — from sunrise to sunset. It is also a picture of eternity, when the LORD will be worshipped all day, every day, forever and ever.
- the LORD will be honoured all over the world. People from all nations will bring pure, undefiled offerings to the LORD, and His Name will be great among all nations, not just in Israel.

This prophecy was not new to the Israelites. In truth, it should have been quite familiar to them. Several prophets had already predicted the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom — a kingdom that would include the Gentile nations and fill the whole earth. Isaiah and Daniel had prophesied this and, most recently, Zechariah had foretold of Christ's coming kingdom in great detail (see Isa 11:3-4, 9; Dan 7:13-14, 27-28; Zep 2:11; 3:8-11; Zec 14:9, 16).

d. The people were dishonouring the LORD's Name by offering blemished sacrifices (vv. 12-13). Furthermore, they knew the sacrifices were unacceptable according to God's law, which meant they were defiling the altar itself. The sacrificial food they laid on God's table or altar was contemptible in God's eyes. It was all the more tragic because they knew the offerings were unacceptable, yet did nothing to correct the situation.

=> The priests carelessly defiled the LORD's table not only by their actions but also by their attitude. Their utter lack of responsibility was shameful and arrogant.

=> The priests stuck up their noses at God's commandments. Apparently, they must have felt that God's demand for the first and best offering was an unnecessary burden on the people. These men who were supposed to lead the people in God's ways totally disregarded God's requirements and even had contempt for them.

e. The people cheated the LORD out of what was rightfully His by law (v. 14). These were men who vowed to give God the best of their flocks — healthy, unblemished animals. Instead, they chose to sacrifice blemished animals. They broke their vows and cheated the LORD, for the covenant He had established with Israel demanded that He be given the best. Moreover, the people had accepted the terms of this covenant and enjoyed its blessings for centuries. Now, however, they mocked and dishonoured it.

Such a greedy practice was also a violation of natural law, considering that God is the rightful owner of all that a person has; and He generously provides for all who trust and honour Him. By withholding from the LORD what was rightfully His, the people showed that they neither trusted the LORD nor were thankful for all He had provided them.

=> Notice what the LORD declared about such individuals: those who cheated — who made vows and broke them — were cursed (v. l4a). This curse meant that a person would no longer enjoy the promised blessings of the Mosaic covenant. They would no longer...

- be prosperous and multiply
- be protected and cared for by the LORD
- be forgiven and restored by the LORD

Nothing in God's law required a man to make a vow, but once he did, he was required to keep it (see Lev 27; Num 30; Deut 23:21-23). Making such a vow and then so thoughtlessly breaking it showed how little regard the people had for the LORD and His Name. It was also a firm indication of how negligent Israel's priests had been, for the people obviously lacked proper respect for the LORD, something the priests should have taught them.

=> The LORD further declared that He was to be feared (v. 14b). That God had to remind the people of this truth showed again just how low the people had sunk. Nevertheless, the LORD repeated the fact that He was a great King and that His name was to be feared. Indeed, a time would come in the future when His Name would be feared among all nations.

4. The LORD issued a strong warning to the priests, making four charges against these religious leaders (2:1-9).

a. The priests had not listened to God nor set their hearts on honouring His Name (vv. 2-3). In light of this, the LORD gave them a clear and ominous warning: if they did not change their ways and begin to honour Him, the hand of God's judgment would fall upon them. They would suffer three terrible consequences:

=> First, the priests would be cursed (v. 2b). This referred to the curses named when God originally gave the law to His people (see Deut 27:15-26; 28:15-68). These curses were the exact opposite of the blessings promised to the people as long as they obeyed God's law. The people would be plagued by...

- poverty and great need instead of prosperity
- sickness and disease instead of health
- drought and famine instead of fruitful harvests
- childlessness and barren wombs instead of fertility

- conflict and war instead of peace
- death and destruction instead of life and abundance

In other words, God would turn the blessings into curses. If all these curses fell on the people, they would naturally fall on the priests as well because the priests depended on the people for their food and provisions. The LORD then added that the curse had, in fact, already begun. The priests had not set their hearts on honouring Him; therefore, both they and their people would suffer the heavy consequences.

=> Second, the priests would bring a rebuke down on their seed or descendants (v. 3a). The Hebrew for seed could be referring specifically to the priests' descendants, suggesting they would be cursed in some way and unable to carry on the priestly line. It could also be referring directly to the priests in Malachi's day, with the curse causing barrenness, preventing them from having children to carry on the line. Most likely, it referred to the priests' descendants, since God makes it clear in verse 3 that these priests were going to be removed from office. In that case, their sons — provided they had any — would not inherit the priesthood nor enjoy any of its privileges or blessings. Rather, they would be cursed as their forefathers had been. Some scholars translate the curse to be on *seed* itself, that is, on the very grain the priests relied on to produce food for their survival. In any case, the disobedience of these priests had already set off a chain of events that would bring further judgment on God's people. Even if they repented (which they did not), the curse had already begun and would continue to impact not only the priests but also their descendants and all those whom they were supposed to represent before God.

=> Third, if the priests did not heed God's warning, God would count them unclean and would dispose of them like dung (v. 3b). This warning from the LORD is extremely graphic and repulsive. Nevertheless, God actually said that He would smear their faces with the dung of the despised and diseased animals they were sacrificing at His altar. Afterward, God would dispose of the priests themselves and carry them off to the dung heap. This is an ugly and distasteful picture, but it powerfully conveys just how degraded these priests had become. They had disrespected and despised the Name of the LORD and by doing so, had tarnished and smeared His Holy Name. If from then on they did not amend their ways, the same thing would be done to them.

b. The priests had not lived up to God's standard as established with Levi (see Exo 29:1-46; Num 3:45-48; 18:21-24; 25:1-13) (vv. 4-7). Compared with Levi, who was the model of what a good priest should be, these priests were failing miserably. And, sadly, they were failing in every respect. Hence, the LORD was warning them to correct their ways in order that His covenant with Levi could continue and stay in effect. Note four truths revealed in the warning:

=> First, the purpose of the covenant with Levi was to bring life, peace and the fear of God (v. 5a). God had established a covenant with Levi to give him and his descendants a livelihood — that is, an income and provisions from the tithes and offerings of the people. But the covenant also indirectly gave the people life by providing them with instruction in God's laws. The priests were supposed to teach the people how to live. This was the very reason the priesthood had been established. It was the specific role of Levi and of all priests to teach the people how to worship, honour and reverence the LORD. If they obeyed God's law, they would have peace with God and one another. If they feared and honoured the LORD, they would equally enjoy a prosperous and abundant life (both individually and as a nation).

=> Second, Levi feared and revered the LORD (v. 5b). He worshipped and stood in awe of Him. The priests of Malachi's day did not.

=> Third, unlike the current priests, Levi taught the truth — God's law and His Holy Word. He also walked with God and turned many of the people away from sin (v. 6).

=> Fourth, Levi set the standard for all priests in that he was a true messenger of the LORD: he guarded the knowledge of God's Holy Word. As long as priests were faithful messengers of the LORD and guarded His Holy Word, they would be sought after by the people, just as Levi had been (v. 7).

c. The priests had turned away from the LORD and caused many to stumble (vv. 8-9a). Unlike Levi, whose faithful instruction had turned the people away from sin and to the LORD, these priests were instead turning people from the ways of the LORD. It was sad enough that these priests disrespected and dishonoured God's Name themselves; but because of their leadership positions, they were teaching the people to do the same by example. Therefore, God pointed out their underlying sin and their coming judgment.

=> Their underlying sin was that they had violated God's covenant with Levi — a covenant that required obedience. The priests had not taught the people to obey God's commandments, nor did they obey His commandments themselves.

=> Their judgment was tragic: they would be despised and humiliated before the people. In contrast to Levi, who was sought after by the people, these priests would be despised and shamed in front of the people. Considering that disobedience to God's law required death (see Num 18:32), this judgment of humiliation was actually quite lenient, showing both God's mercy and His supreme desire for His people to learn His ways. In other words, God had not yet completely given up on His people, not even these priests. Though they would be shamed, they were being offered a second chance.

d. The priests had shown partiality among the people (v. 9b). This was the final evidence God offered to prove that His Name had been profaned. These priests were apparently tailoring their messages to each different audience or person they addressed. They

feared man more than God and preached only what itching ears wanted to hear. They were likely offering favourable judgments and leniency in matters of the law whenever dealing with the rich and powerful. In this way, would not offend and would be well compensated. On the other hand, they were probably harsher and stricter when enforcing religious law among the poor and powerless. Such partiality is totally contrary to a just and impartial God — the LORD who shows no favouritism, but instead judges every man fairly according to his deeds (1 Pet 1:17; see Jas 2:9).

In all of these charges, it is obvious that the priests had not grasped the true significance and privilege of their position. They were merely performing a job — not the vital ministry to which they had been called. They seemed to have no sense of loyalty or commitment to the LORD or to the people they represented as they went through the motions day by day. Their insincere attitudes and actions were detestable to the LORD.

***Thought 1.*** Because God is holy and wants only the best *for* us, He demands the best *from* us. Anything less than our best is insufficient. Excellence is even more critical for the minister of God. Ministers are called to instruct people in the ways of the LORD, to uphold the honour of God's Name and set an example for God's people. But if God's own ministers do not fear and look up to the LORD, if they themselves dishonour the LORD and His Holy Name, what hope is there for the people to live righteous and godly lives? This was the case with Israel and, sadly, it is the case in many church and ministries today. God-fearing and God-honouring ministers have never been more desperately needed. God's Word is very specific about the attitudes and characteristics God requires of His ministers:

***Luke 22:26*** *"But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves."*

***1 Cor 1:17*** *For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel — not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

***1 Cor 9:16*** *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

***1 Th 2:4*** *On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.*

***2 Tim 2:22-25*** *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.*

***2 Tim 4:2*** *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

***Titus 1:7*** *Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*

***1 Pet 5:2-4*** *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

(See also Rom 10:14; 1 Cor l;17; 2 Cor 4:2; 2 Cor 5:18; 2 Cor 6:4-10; 1 Th 2:9; 1 Th 5:14; 1 Ti.2:7; 1 Tim 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6; 1 Tim 4:12; 1 Tim 6:6-11.) ■