

Leftovers for the Lord

6 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name.

Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'

7 "You offer defiled food on My altar.

But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?'

By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' 8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

9 "But now entreat God's favor, That He may be gracious to us.

While this is being done by your hands, Will He accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts. 10 "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," Says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands. 11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts. 12 "But you profane it,

In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD.

14 "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished-- For I am a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations. (Mal 1:6-14)

In Washington DC there is a military cemetery known as Arlington National Cemetery. There you will find the *Tomb of the Unknowns*, or the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*. It is a memorial to the fallen American soldiers of World War I and II, Korea and Vietnam, whose remains have been unidentified. A plaque reads: "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God." Watching vigil over this memorial is a platoon of 30 soldiers. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, these men unceasingly guard this tomb. When a guard is on duty, he walks exactly 21 steps down the black mat towards the Tomb, faces east for 21 seconds, turns and faces north for 21 seconds, then takes 21 steps down the mat and repeats the process. After the turn, the sentinel executes a sharp "shoulder-arms" movement to place the weapon on the shoulder closest to the visitors to signify that the sentinel stands between the Tomb and any possible threat. Twenty-one is the military's highest honour. For an hour in winter, and for half an hour in the blazing heat of summer, the soldier guards the tomb, in his dress uniform of 100% wool. The soldiers who serve as sentinels are not mere guards. They are in fact, the very best soldiers of the elite 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, who train for tactical and battle missions like all other soldiers. As to preparation for each shift, a soldier takes six hours to prepare his uniform, steaming it, placing each piece of brass precisely measured. Shining the specially made shoes takes four hours. When the guard is changed, a simple but powerful ceremony takes place at which watching tourists are asked to stand and be silent. Most don't need to be asked, they just sense the reverence of the occasion.

Nothing about the ceremony, the soldiers, the preparation and training of the men would come across as casual. Nothing in it would come across as irreverent, shoddy, disrespectful.

Our culture still knows how to express reverence. Our culture still knows how to express a sense of deep respect. That's what the U.S. does for its soldiers that have died for the nation.

The question is then, do Christians still know how to express reverence and respect and honour to God, to their Lord who died for them? It's hard to argue that reverence and respect for God are widespread. Edward Farley . . . commented that contemporary worship creates a tone that is "casual, comfortable, chatty, busy, humorous, pleasant and at times even cute...if the seraphim assumed this Sunday morning mood, they would be addressing God not as 'holy, holy, holy,' but as 'nice, nice, nice.

When you think of the average church's approach to God, how they sing, how they pray, what they speak about, the tone of the service, you have to ask, is *reverent* the first word that comes to mind? Does *honour* immediately jump to mind to describe what attitude is being shown? A few years ago, a book came out called "The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity." Many Christians have a very manageable God, a very tame, controllable God, and so the approach to such a tame God is casual, chatty, informal, even fun.

For many, God is weightless. He rests upon their minds so lightly as to make little impression. In fact, the idea of reverence, honour, deeper respect, awe, or even dread has nothing to do with their conception of God.

Of course, the defence that most people make is the s-word. Sincerity. So long as people are sincere, which can mean anything, then nothing they say or do can be held against them. Sincerity becomes a trump card that dismisses all objections. Sincerity is the magic detergent that removes all the dark blots of irreverence, dishonour and profanity.

And the most convenient thing about the sincerity defence is that you get to define your sincerity inside your own head. No one can ever objectively judge how sincere you are, because only you know how sincere you are. Isn't that handy?

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work with God Himself. Because God has quite a bit to say about irreverent worship. And here's what's interesting. When the people we're going to see here in Malachi dispute God's charge that they are irreverent, He doesn't say, "You are not sincere, and I can tell, because I alone can see into your heart." No, instead God goes to their external, measurable, verifiable acts of worship. Because what we think of God, how we respect Him how we revere Him will have visible, physical effects in our lives. Our actions, our words, our ways will put on display how deeply we reverence God. At that point you can say as much as you like about how sincere you are in all you do, but that's just talk. Show me your faith by your works. Honouring God with your lips when your heart is far from Him helps no one.

God charged Israel with irreverence. Here in Malachi 1, we'll see God deal with a people who were still worshipping the one true God, but doing so with flippancy, casualness, sloppiness, apathy. God charges them, and then when they dispute the charge, God backs up His case. But He lovingly gives the cure as well, the remedy.

Where we are as a church with reverence is something we need to examine. Where we are as individuals with honour, reverence and respect is something we need to examine. This passage will search us, if we'll let it. God desires to bring His people into the joy of fearing Him, and if we will see how He did it with Israel, we, too, may take the remedy and find that joy of fearing Him.

I. The Charge

6 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name.

God comes to Israel and says, "You do not honour Me. You do not reverence Me. My name, My reputation is being despised by you priests."

God uses an example from natural law. In human families, children are to show honour and respect for parents. In human society, servants, subordinates are to show respect and honour to their masters

or managers.

God says, I actually am a Father, and a Master, but I am not receiving honour and reverence. God was the father of Israel, and the Master of Israel, but He received no respect and honour from them.

But here comes the reply.

Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'

The priests reply, "Really? In what way do we dishonour You, irreverence You, treat Your reputation as light?" It's a strange law of life. Reverent people know reverence, but irreverent people do not. When you are modest in your heart, you work that out into your appearance, but when you are immodest, you don't know what is meant by immodesty. Courteous people know courtesy; rude people will dispute, "Since when was I rude?"

II. The Case

7 "You offer defiled food on My altar.

God's case is this: Your worship is defective. You offer defiled food. Your sacrifices are defective and not acceptable.

Once again, here are irreverent people arguing with God.

But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?'

"Really? In what way are they defective?"

God says, I'll tell you how it is defective: your actions, your attitudes, and your expectations.

Look at Israel's actions in worship.

8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil?

"And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering!

14 "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished

What kind of animals did Israel bring to God? Animals that were blind, lame, sick, blemished, and even stolen. Now understand what was going on here. In the first place, God had a standard of what kind of animals were allowed to be sacrificed to him.

But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. (Deu 15:21)

Lev 22:20 *Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.*

Lev 22:24 *You shall not offer to the LORD what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land.*

In the second place, even in the human realm, you wouldn't give these kinds of animals. In an agricultural economy, animals were a source of exchange, so the kind of animal you gave expressed the quality of the gift. To give a diseased, lame, blemished animal was an insult.

Imagine receiving from someone a half-eaten box of chocolates, or a book with scribbles and food-

stains in it, or clothes with huge moth-holes, or a tool or a gadget or a computer that doesn't work at all. Would you receive that gladly? Would you give that? Normal social etiquette and courtesy say, don't give people whom you respect throwaways, leftovers, junk as a gift.

In other words, Israel had completely inverted the whole idea of sacrifice. They were not giving what cost them, what expressed value. They were giving what they didn't want anyway. They were giving what they themselves would not keep. This is the opposite of sacrifice. And so it is the opposite of worship.

In the New Testament, sacrifice takes on a different approach. It is no longer animals that are the sacrifice of worship.

Let me show you the three things that the New Testament calls a sacrifice for us.

Your Self

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Rom 12:1)

Your body, which means your whole self is to be put on the altar. You give your life, with your loves, your desires, your goals, your priorities, your dreams, your wishes, your abilities, your personality, your future, and you offer it up. Very importantly, this is your time, because time is the measure of you giving of yourself.

Like Isaac on the altar, you are willing to let it become God's in every way. God says this burnt offering of your life is in fact your reasonable service.

Your Substance

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. (Phi 4:17-18)

Our money, and our possessions, and the way we give is called by Scripture here a sacrifice. We no longer trade in animals, we trade in currency, and that money, and the way we use it is the NT version of sacrifice.

Your Song

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Heb 13:15)

Your acts of verbal worship, in prayer, in song, in thanksgiving, in testimony, in speaking publicly of God to His gathered people, and even outside of that. How you honour God with your lips is part of that NT sacrifice.

So, think about your self, your substance, your song. Ask yourself, what would be a defiled, defective offering of these to my God? What would it mean for these to be blind, lame, sick, blemished?

Here is a way to measure if we are sacrificing, or if we have done what the Israelites did and inverted sacrifice into leftovers. Three deadly 'C's' – comfort, convenience, and casualness. When what I offer is governed by how comfortable it is to me, how convenient it is to offer, and how

casual I feel in offering it, I am inverting the whole idea of sacrifice.

When I attend church when it is comfortable and convenient, but if it is not, I complain. When I give what I don't really need, so long as it doesn't hit me in my comforts. When I pray, as long as I can still feel casual and comfortable when I do it. When I serve in church, as long as it's convenient, and fits into my life, and feels comfortable. When I sing and worship only in those places and times where I feel relaxed, informal and casual. When I get involved in other Christian's lives if it is convenient for me, and never becomes uncomfortable.

When I give God what I don't really need anyway, I am giving Him leftovers. When the world, my job, my family, my education, my business, my hobby gets quality time, sacrificial effort, late nights, early mornings, planned commitments, expensive gifts, quality service, my very best, and God gets what's left when I'm finished with those, I'm giving Him leftovers.

You see, only you know what kind of sacrifice and quality you give to other things in your life, and what you give to God. And it's at this moment that we deceive ourselves by using the sincerity word. "Yes, going by how I treat church and prayer, and service, I might appear that I give God leftovers, but that's not true, because God knows my heart, that I'm sincere." No, instead of using a pagan culture's standard of feelings and intuition and sincerity, use God's standard of sacrifice. What does it look like? Does it cost?

And you see, accompanying this action of apathy is an attitude of apathy.

In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts.

The attitude is one of contempt for the idea of sacrifice. The idea that worshiping God may be inconvenient at times, uncomfortable at times, and the very opposite of casual brings a feeling of resentment. The service of God seems like a burden, a heaviness, and an interruption to my life. Why must I give of myself, and my substance, and my song?

But then ironically, alongside an attitude of contempt is an expectation that God should receive it. The Israelites actually expected God to accept what they gave.

Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

9 "But now entreat God's favor, That He may be gracious to us.

While this is being done by your hands, Will He accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts. 10 "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," Says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

God says, if you doubt that this is unacceptable, try this experiment. Try offering this to your human authorities. Would they accept it? Helpful hint: transfer your attitudes and actions towards God to your workplace, to your home life -would it work? Would it be accepted?

Amazingly, in verse 9, Israel says to Malachi "Pray for us. Ask God to be kind to us." The reply is Why should He when this continues? Stop with the religious treadmill. Put a halt to the whole thing. Stop taking false comfort in your routines and uninterrupted rituals.

It's strange how often these two are mixed. There's the complaining that God seems to expect so much of us, but then right along side that is the attitude of, "But how could He not accept it if we give it? And if we're sincere?"

God's charge was, "You don't reverence or honour Me." Israel disputed that. God's case is, Look at

your actions, and look at your attitude. There is no cost to you, no sacrifice. I am worth little to you, because nothing you do for me really costs you.

But God graciously gives more than a charge and a case, He also gives Israel the cure.

III. The Cure

*11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts.
For I am a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.*

Here is the cure for cheap worship and leftover service. Meditate on the greatness of God. God's worship is to be global and continuing. As dawn breaks over any longitude of the Earth, as believers open their eyes, they are to begin acknowledging and honouring and praising. And they do that as the sun moves overhead to afternoon, till it sets. And all the while as the Earth turns, believers are waking and praising, a non-stop relay of praise, 24 hours a day.

Verse 14, God says, I am not a petty ruler, a small governor. I am a great King, to be revered among all nations.

The start of reverence is to meditate on His name. You have to believe and acknowledge what God says about Himself here. And you will want to be reading Scriptures that speak of God's greatness. The creation account, and all the creation Psalms. The account of God's mighty deliverances of His people. Scriptures like Isaiah 40 through 48, Job 38 through 42. You want to read the life of our Lord Jesus again and again, and marvel that one so high walked and lived and died for us. Only if you join that group of people spoken of in Malachi 3:16 that meditated on His name, will reverence ever have a chance.

But then secondly, you need to think about your sacrifices – yourself, your substance, and your songs. Let me first encourage you by saying that there is a once-for-all sacrifice that has been made on your behalf that perfects you before God and covers all your service. *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Heb 10:14)*

Jesus Christ's righteousness is counted towards you the day you trust Christ. His perfect reverence and fear of God is counted towards you. His flawless worship and service of God is counted towards you. You stand before God clothed in His service and worship.

But should we then sin because grace abounds? Should we use this liberty as an occasion to be careless and sloppy? No! The opposite. Motivated by love, empowered by grace, we should be nothing like the Jews who became so irreverent. We who live in the shadow of the cross should have the most exemplary, costly, worthy worship and service. We should be breaking open alabaster boxes and pouring costly perfume on our Saviour.

But how do we do that, if we don't feel that way? Well, first we must meditate on His greatness, and believe in His grace. But then, here is some practical advice from C.S. Lewis. "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."

We can paraphrase that for our purposes. "Do not waste time bothering whether you feel respectful

and reverent towards God; act as if you do. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you honoured someone, you will presently come to honour him.”

While you are meditating on the greatness of God, begin acting towards God as if He is worthy of your best effort, your costliest service, your best sacrifices. Repent of casualness, or prioritising comfort or convenience in your worship sacrifice.

Do you know why so many of those who gave up home and family to preach the Gospel in a foreign land came to revere God so? Because in that very act, they were demonstrating both to God and to themselves how much God was worth to them.

Because, sadly, the reverse is also true. Treat God casually, and guess what attitude will grow in your heart? Let your worship of God be all about comfort, convenience, casualness, and guess what will grow in your heart? Be sloppy, last-minute, give Him remainders, leftovers, and you will come to have contempt for God in your heart. And you will blame the church and God Himself for interrupting your life.

I watched an interview with one of the sentinels who guards the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Sergeant Alfred Lanier. Sergeant Lanier stood guard even during Hurricane Isabelle. At one point in the interview, the interviewer asks him “Do you ever think to yourself, Why are we going to all this trouble?” Sergeant Lanier responded to the interviewer, “Not really. We're gonna give them the best that we can. And that's what we're doing.”