THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
EPHESIANS 2:20

“Lord, I Need an Attitude Adjustment”
Studies in Malachi
by George Williams

Published by 21st Century Christian
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about the author

George Micheal Williams has served as ministering evangelist to the Church of Christ at East Side in Austin, Texas for the past 32 years. He is a highly respected minister of the gospel. He has conducted gospel meetings and revivals across the United States, and spoken at National Lectureships of Churches of Christ, various statewide lectureships, and conducted citywide revivals and campaigns in Texas. He has also conducted marriage and family workshops and leadership workshops.

Williams is a native Texan. He holds degrees from Southwestern Christian College (A.A), from Abilene Christian University (B.S. in ministry and evangelism, and a M.S., in biblical & related studies). He was acknowledged as an African American male role model within the Austin community and received the Southwestern Christian College Image Award. He served as a literary contributor to the Blueprints Bible curriculum.

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how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called *The Foundation*. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called *The Cornerstone*. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called *The Inscription*. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking *Discussion Questions* that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
The prophet Malachi has the unique distinction of being the final prophetic voice as God closes His revelation to His people in the Old Testament. God leaves a scathing message excoriating His people for their dishonorable attitudes toward Him, which manifested themselves in their worship habits and in their daily lives.

The heart of the message of the book of Malachi deals with the heart of the people. In Malachi 1:2 God says, “‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. ‘Yet you ask, ‘In what way have You loved us?’” When God’s people questioned His love for them, it affected their attitude toward Him, and impacted every aspect of their lives.

In this study of the book of Malachi, we will see the relevancy of his message to this modern generation. We will discover that the attitudes that we form in our hearts toward God cannot be concealed. We will recognize that when we have no respect for God, worship becomes meaningless perfunctory rituals, and our lives are thrown into chaotic dysfunction in every area.

However, the good news from Malachi is that if we have an attitude adjustment, (sincere reverence for God) our worship will become more meaningful, and our lives will be less chaotic and dysfunctional. Malachi seeks to help us with that attitude adjustment. “Malachi will show us what is going wrong in our hearts and tell us how to fix it.” Like a good doctor, he will diagnose our problem and then write the prescription that will affect our healing.
In 1984 the singer Tina Turner released the most successful song of her career entitled, “What’s Love Got to Do With It?” In 1993 the song was made into a movie loosely based on Tina Turner’s tumultuous relationship with her husband, Ike Turner. The question that the song raises (about the significance of love in a relationship) is supposed to elicit the response, “Nothing!” According to the song, love is nothing more than a “secondhand emotion” that leaves you with a broken heart. However, contrary to her sentiments, love has everything to do with every meaningful relationship in life, especially our relationship with God.

When Malachi comes on the scene in the fifth century B.C. (450-430), he opens his prophetic oracle addressing that same critical question, “What’s love got to do with it?” (Malachi 1:2 NKJV). The people had returned from exile, the temple had been rebuilt, and the sacrificial system re-established. However, there was no true love and devotion for the Lord. Worship had degenerated into empty rituals. The people were cynical and questioned the benefits of living a godly life. The priests and the people were in violation of God’s law concerning sacrifices, tithes, offerings, morals, divorce, and marriage. At the heart of this spiritual apathy was
their erroneous theology of a loveless God. Looking only at what they had lost since the captivity and how feeble their nation was, God’s people questioned His love. This cynicism precipitated a spirit of indifference and apathy toward God. Malachi reveals to us that love for God, and the love of God has everything to do with life and worship.

In Malachi 1:2a God said, “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’” God immediately confronts His people with the heart of the issue. He confronts the spirit responsible for their spirit of apathy. He does so by quoting their own words and repeating their own thoughts. God’s diagnosis of the root cause of their spiritual lethargy and indifference was the cynicism that existed in the hearts of His people concerning His love for them.

**Fruit Versus Root**

God’s people were guilty of dishonoring Him in worship. The priests encouraged the people to offer inferior sacrifices to God, and accepted lame, blind, and emaciated animals (Malachi 1:6-8). Worship was reduced to going through ritualistic motions devoid of all reverence. And God denounced it as blasphemous mockery that robbed Him of His honor as their Father, Master, and King (Malachi 1:6-9, 14). The charade of their worship disgusted Him so much that He declared, “Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors…” (Malachi 1:10 NIV).

What a pathetic picture! However, when God confronts His people for their irreverent behavior, He immediately deals with the root cause of the problem instead of the fruit of the problem. The reason that many people never change their worship habits and their life habits is because they are always dealing with the symptoms of the problem instead of
the root cause of the problem. By definition, a symptom is a sign that indicates the presence of something that is more serious than the symptom itself. For example, shortness of breath could be symptomatic of a respiratory or cardiac condition. The root problem is deeper and more serious than the symptom.

Often times when addressing issues in the church such as: *worship attendance, giving accordingly, righteous living, and worshiping God in spirit and in truth*, we tend to deal with the symptoms instead of the root cause of the symptoms. A lack of attending worship regularly; a lack of involvement; a lack of giving proportionally; or a lack of living a godly life. All are symptoms of a deeper problem.

Malachi gets to the heart of the matter. He identifies what is at the root of the people's indifference toward God. He deals with the root, because he realizes that if the root of the problem is not addressed the fruit will continue to be putrid. Consequently, to affect meaningful change in our lives we need to address the root cause of our spiritual deficiencies instead of the fruit. Until we get to the root of the matter the fruit that matters will continue to be rancid.

**The Root of the Problem**

According to Malachi 1:2, the reason that the people could offer inferior sacrifices to God and feel no conviction was because they felt that the Lord did not love them. Their attitude was, *Since the Lord does not love us, why should we love Him and why reverence Him in worship?* Consequently, they engaged in the rituals of worship but there was no true love for God in their hearts. Unfortunately that attitude is pervasive in the Lord's church today. We give to the Lord, but not our best—our best is reserved for us. Then we have the audacity to question God's love when we are struggling:

- To pay the light bill for our 5,000-square foot home.
- To make the car note on our new Mercedes.
- To keep steak and lobster on the table.
- To pay our $200.00 a month cable bill to watch our 60-inch television.
- To decide whether to tip the waiter 15, 18, or 20 percent.
- To figure out how to pay the tuition for our children’s private school education.

We struggle with those things and then question the love of God. Instead of counting our blessings, we count our burdens.

Times were difficult in Malachi’s day; but the Lord still provided. Likewise, even in our most difficult times, the Lord continues to provide for us, because He is Jehovah-Jireh (Genesis 22:14; Philippians 4:19). Therefore, in the best of times and the worst of times, the Lord deserves our best.

**Dare You Question My Love**

In Malachi 1:2-3a God says, for you to question My love shows your ignorance of your own biblical history. The irrefutable evidence of My love for you is My divine election of you as My chosen people. I chose you instead of Esau—“Jacob I loved; but Esau I have hated…”

In context the word *hated* does not mean abhorrence or detestation; but rather it refers to God’s choice of Jacob instead of Esau. We would say—Jacob I chose, but Esau I did not choose. According to God’s foreknowledge He chose Jacob instead of Esau (*the rightful heir of the firstborn’s blessing*). Instead of giving it to Esau, God gave it to Jacob. Therefore God said, *how can you accuse Me of not loving you? My love for you was manifested before you existed as a nation. My divine election of you as My chosen people is undeniable evidence of My unmerited and unconditional love for you.*

Let us never forget that as it was with Jacob so it is with us. There is nothing so intrinsically good about us that would merit God’s love. Paul said in Romans 5:8, “But God
demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The reason we are saved today is because God made the divine choice before the foundation of the world to save those in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-8). We did nothing to deserve His love then, and we have done nothing to deserve it now. We are saved by the love, grace, and mercy of God (Ephesians 2:5-8). Consequently, it is unconscionable and unacceptable for us to behave indifferent and irreverent toward God.

Further Proof of My Love
In Malachi 1:4-5, God offers more evidence of His love for His people. God said in addition to My election of you, I restored you to your homeland. However, because of the perpetual wickedness of Edom (Esau), his land is a barren wasteland reserved for jackals.

How many times have you fallen into sin, yet God restored you? How many times have you promised God that you would never do “that” again, but you did it anyway? How many times has God forgiven you since you have been in Christ? If you are like most, you have lost count. But in spite of our shortcomings, God has continued to bless us; and His continued restoration is irrefutable evidence of His perpetual love for us (Romans 8:31-39).

One of the greatest needs in the church today is for the church to cultivate a reverent attitude toward God and His worship. Many of us need an attitude adjustment when it comes to how we see God and how we worship Him. Too often we take God for granted and treat His worship with contempt. We come in late and leave early. We come to church instead of coming to worship. We sit and spectate instead of participating. We offer Him our dregs instead of our best.
The problem with God’s people during Malachi’s time was a lack of love for God, which precipitated the fruit of irreverence and indifference. Love was the missing component, and irreverence and indifference were the fruit. What’s love got to do with it?—Everything (Matthew 22:37-38; Revelation 2:1-5).

Questions For Discussion
1. How does love for God relate to what we offer God?
2. What precipitates a spirit of apathy and indifference toward God?
3. What is the difference between the root and fruit of our spiritual ills?
4. How can we cultivate the right attitude toward God and His worship?
5. What are some of the proofs of God’s love in our lives?
6. What is the difference between coming to church and going to worship?