

Intro

If we value something, we don't treat it casually. Once I highlighted my ottoman. I protect it from being destroyed by children.

Women, do you treat your jewelry casually? Do you keep track of it? Do you keep it in a safe place? Do you let children play with a diamond ring?

Men, do you treat your vehicles casually? Do you let rust go unattended? Do you change the oil? Do you let children play on the hood? Would you care if a child took a crowbar to the paint job?

Family heirlooms. Do you lend them out to anyone? Do you leave them on the floor for children to play with?

What I'm saying is if we value something we don't treat it casually. If we value God, we won't treat him casually either.

BIG IDEA: Beware of spiritual apathy.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Israel is doubting God's love because of humbling circumstances and delayed promises. Doubt is affecting their conduct.

God charges Israel with failure to honor and fear him. God anticipates their protests. God challenges their protests and calls them to repent.

Point 1: Beware of failure to fear God (1:6-8)

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?"

In that culture it was assumed that sons honored fathers. And servants honored masters. If earthly authorities are honored, why isn't the LORD of the universe being honored?

Father = how God portrays himself. How we relate to God. A father:

- 1) Leads
- 2) Provides
- 3) Protects
- 4) Instructs
- 5) Disciplines
- 6) Comforts
- 7) Listens

This is who God is for us as father.

Honor = literally “heavy” or “weighty.” Figurative meaning is important, noteworthy, impressive. God is weighty, so we don’t treat him casually.

We value God like a woman values her jewelry and citizens value a police officer’s badge.

And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.

God challenges the priests. The problem? They don’t fear him = they despise him.

Fear = a basic meaning of “dread” or “terror.” For the believer, it’s an attitude towards God. Treating God as sacred. Respect, devotion, reverential awe. Sometimes fear is used as a synonym for righteous living. Fearing God leads to obedience. Fearing God is Old Testament speak for saving faith.

For the **Christian**, God is a terror and an attractive delight. We’re in fearful awe of tornados, God’s corrective discipline, and the final judgment.

On the other hand, God is a good Father. Jesus a self-giving Savior. The Spirit kills destructive sin in our hearts.

Fearing God, we don’t treat his commands casually. We don’t disregard his word like the priests.

As believers, we’re confident in God’s steadfast love (permanent, pledged commitment to us). We’re don’t fear rejection. After all, we’ve received his mercy. We’ve found him to be a compassionate and forgiving God. We know our debt is paid because Jesus died in our place, taking the punishment of our sins.

We value God. We don’t want his discipline. We fear hardness of heart. We fear sin’s consequences. So we don’t treat his commands casually.

Non-Christian, God is a consuming fire to be dreaded. Fearful expectation that God is holy and punishes sin should lead us to faith and repentance. Today we learn how to respond to God. Our problem is we don’t fear God.

But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'

The priests dispute God’s accusation.

By offering polluted food upon my altar.

The offerings aren’t up to God’s standards. This matters because it’s “my altar.”

But you say, 'How have we polluted you?'

The priests are blind to their sin. Or they’re just defiant. Or a combination of both.

By saying that the LORD's table may be despised.

They approve their sin.

When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?

God provides his evidence. The priests are offering blind, lame, and sick animals. Why is this a problem?

Sacrifices

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁸ "Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel presents a burnt offering as his offering, for any of their vows or freewill offerings that they offer to the LORD, ¹⁹ if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats. ²⁰ You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. ²¹ And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. ²² Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the LORD or give them to the LORD as a food offering on the altar. – Leviticus 22:17-22

The priests should have been familiar with these demands. The offerings had to be without blemish because of who they were being offered to: the holy God who is without blemish. Likewise, Jesus needed to be without blemish, without sin, for the Father to receive him his death on the cross.

Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

A human authority wouldn't accept blemished animals. So why would God?

Application

The problem is doing whatever we want. Treating God casually. Whether it's defying what we know or being ignorant of what we should know. Are we okay with disobedience? Is God weighty to you?

God's rebuke is directed specifically at the priests. The leaders. In our day, the elders.

Are we casual with the instructions and patterns we find in the New Testament? The problem in our day is infidelity to Paul's instructions. Leaders can't reject Scripture in favor of their own preferences, ease, etc.

Malachi calls us to take seriously the Bible's instruction to the churches. Christian, it's okay to respectfully question your elders' fidelity to Scripture. Christian, base your concerns on Scripture.

God is particular. He desires that things be done a certain way. That's one reason we have Bibles.

Point 2: Beware of persistent unrepentance (1:9-11)

And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us.

Treating God casually has left the people without God's favor. In the Old Testament, God can shine his face upon someone or hide his face. If they wanted God to come to their aid, they needed to repent. If they repent, they'll find God to be gracious.

Gracious = when one in position to help responds positively to cries of one in need. It's undeserved compassion that acts.

Repentance (turn from sin to God) is assumed. God isn't saying keep on doing as your doing. Just ask for mercy and all will be well. He's saying, repent by fearing and honoring me and I will respond positively to you.

With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.

The implied answer is no. If you continue to treat me casually, you won't have my favor. So repent.

Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

God would rather have the temple doors shut than have polluted offerings. Blemished offerings are in vain. God won't accept them.

What would they lose if the doors were locked?

- 1) They would lose the sin offering, where they acknowledged sin needed to be forgiven.

When made in faith, God accepted their sacrifices. They accepted God's forgiveness and had a cleansed conscience. Animal sacrifices didn't remove their sin. Animal sacrifices pointed to Jesus' once for all offering of himself for our sins on the cross.

- 2) They would lose opportunity to draw near to God in burnt and thank offerings.

Sacrifices were opportunities to express dedication and thanks to God.

[see 2 Chronicles 29:20-36 for three stages of offerings.]

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

While declaring Israel's present failure he speaks to the future. One day the nations will be converted and offer pure worship. This happened following the Great Commission. Today we are fulfillment of this prophecy!

A strong indictment. You my chosen people don't honor my name, but the Gentiles will.

Shutting the door

God would rather the doors be shut than he be dishonored. In Revelation 2:5, Jesus warns the Ephesian church that he'll remove their lampstand if they don't repent. Meaning he'll put an end to their existence as a local church.

If a church declines to a certain point (e.g., abusive or unconverted pastors/elders; removal of faithful pastors/elders; hatred for non-Christians; failure to confront immorality; affirming immorality; fights for power; fights for preferences), God would rather have the doors shut and raise up something new and faithful. Sometimes the doors close. Sometimes God gives the church over to its own desires and takes his empowering grace elsewhere. Looking elsewhere. That's what he did with Israel and Gentiles. Jesus said:

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. – Matt 21:43

I have nothing particular in mind here. Just a warning we all need to remember. Sadly, throughout church history once faithful churches have closed or become gatherings of the unconverted.

On the other hand, churches that fear God and honor his word have his favor in unspecified ways. Maybe spiritual gifts, finances, pastors and missionaries raised from within the congregation, godly homes, a maturing people, unity, love, evangelistic fruit, etc.

Non-Christian

God is merciful to anyone who comes to him on his terms. He's gracious to people who acknowledge their wrong, confess their sins, and listen to his word. People who repent are compassionately welcomed by God. Jesus' death is worthy to cover your sins. No matter how bad. God wants us to be exemplary repenters when confronted with God's word.

Point 3: Beware of being weary of God's commands (1:12-14)

But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.

"But you" = contrast with the Gentiles of the future. What's being profaned? God's name.

Profaned = treating God as common or unholy. They treated God as common by rejecting his instructions.

Despised = failure to value the Lord's table. Like Esau despised his birthright by giving it to Jacob for food (Gen 25:34).

But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

The people, not just the priests, are being implicated here. Who's bringing the animals to the priests?

Weariness = a bothersome burden, drudgery, exasperated by meticulous sacrificial laws.

Snort at = contempt, anger.

The people see God's laws as oppressive burdens rather than life-giving expressions of God's grace. The sacrifices gave them opportunity to experience God's forgiveness. Opportunity to express thanks to God. **They weren't seeing clearly.** They only saw the work required. What they had to give up. They didn't see that it was a blessing to have fellowship with God.

Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

Again, the people are in view. They are ones who bring blemished animals. The people shouldn't be bringing them. The priests should be rejecting them. Both subject themselves to God's curse. More on that next week.

Why is this such a problem? God is a great king. God notes the future again. The Gentiles will succeed where Israel failed. The Gentiles will fear God.

Recap

The people have failed to fear God. Blemished animals is the proof. They've found God's commands a burden. God says repent and I'll bless you.

Application

In order to worship God, we need to see clearly. God's demands are life-giving, not burdens to be endured.

NT sacrifices

- 1) Is giving to God (Phil 4:14-18) an oppressive suppression of my rights and desires, or does it free us from being mastered by money and things?
- 2) Is praising God and gathering with the saints (Heb 10:25; 13:15) an oppressive demand on my time and recreational desires, or a life-giving encounter with God and his people?
- 3) Are instructions about the tongue (Eph 4:29; Jas 3:1-12) oppressive restrictions on free speech, or life-giving wisdom that prevents us from ruining our relationships and bringing shame on ourselves?
- 4) Is doing good works (Heb 13:16) an oppressive, restrictive way of doing life, or the fruit of a life-giving Spirit who sets us free from destructive patterns.
- 5) Is evangelism (Rom 15:16) an oppressive duty, or a life-giving opportunity to share with others what is so precious to us?

What I'm saying is it's all about our perspective. Is the Bible an oppressive burden, or life-giving wisdom to the fool? Is Jesus an oppressive taskmaster, or a self-giving servant who rescues those who are blind and slaves to sin?

Conclusion

How do we respond to God?

Not with **apathy**.

Beware of failure to fear God.

Treat God as the sacred, holy, great King instead of common.

Beware of persistent unrepentance.

Be an exemplary repentant.

Beware of being weary of God's commands.

See God's demands as life-giving.