

The Responsibility of Consecration – Malachi 2:1-9

Introduction: Huckleberry Finn was Mark Twain’s young and wild hillbilly boy who the widow Douglas took into her home and tried to civilize. She got him to bathe, she dressed him in nice clothes, and even sent him to school. But old Huck couldn’t take it, so he took off. Here is what he told his buddy Tom Sawyer about life with widow Douglas:

“I’ve tried it and it don’t work Tom. It ain’t for me; I ain’t used to it. The widders’ been good to me and friendly; but I can’t stand them ways... I got to got to church and sweat and sweat – I got to talk to so nice it wasn’t comfortable – I’d go up to the attic and rip out awhile – every day just to get a taste in my mouth, or I’d ‘a’ died, Tom. The widder wouldn’t let me smoke; she wouldn’t let me yell, she wouldn’t let me gape, nor stretch, nor scratch before folks... And dad fetch it, she prayed all the time! I never seen such a woman! I had to shove Tom – I just had to.”

Sometimes Christians have the same problem. If we fail to understand what the Christian life is all about, that with this new-found freedom comes responsibility, we’ll find ourselves wanting God’s blessings, but not His requirements. We’ll like the idea of being saved and on our way to Heaven, but we won’t be interested in what He wants us to do along the way. We’ll end up warming the pew, but rarely working in the field.

But God has called His people to worship and serve Him. Mal. 2:1-9 mentions a serious and solemn responsibility each and every Christian has- to be consecrated or set apart to serve and worship God. First, let’s examine the concept of:

1. Consecration (1-3)

Vs. 1 tells us that this admonition is given to the priests. However, **2 Tim. 3:16 (NIV)** says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,”* So, every word of God speaks to us.

God used the term *“priest”* to not only to identify the certain lineage of Levi in the Old Testament, but also to describe Christians in the New Testament. Let me explain:

A. We are not priests in the OT sense. In the Old Testament, God ordained priests from the descendants of Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi to serve as priests in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. They were

consecrated, or set apart by God to lead in the worship and service of God.

Under the New Covenant, the office of priest was fulfilled by Christ who became our High Priest by offering Himself as the offering for our sins. Heb. 4:14 says, “...we have a great high priest, who has gone to Heaven, Jesus the Son of God.” But while the office of priest was fulfilled by Christ, the function of the priest still exists.

B. We are priests in the NT sense. In the New Testament, Christians are called to be a royal priesthood. **1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)** says, “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* That means that under the New Covenant, every believer is called to be consecrated and set apart for His use. As His priests, that is our responsibility and calling. Our lives, our words, our thoughts, our deeds, our homes, our attitudes- all of these things are to be pleasing to God and separated from the world.

Our prayer should be that of Francis Ridley Havergal. Once she was visiting in a home where there were 10 persons, some of them not saved, some saved but not very happy. She became burdened that they might know the Savior as joyfully as she had come to know Him. Before she left, her prayer was answered. She spent the night writing what is probably her best known hymn.

“Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord, to Thee; Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love, At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee; Take my voice and let me sing always only for my King, Always only for my King.

Take my silver and my gold. Not a mite would I withhold; Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine; Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne, It shall be Thy royal throne.

Oh that this would be our prayer and pursuit – to have our lives wholly and fully consecrated – set apart to serve the Lord. Unfortunately, many Christians seem to have forgotten their calling, just as the priests of Malachi’s day had forgotten their calling. The religion of these Jews had become more of a ritual than a

relationship.

But being consecrated was supposed to be the lifestyle of the priests. But being consecrated to God is more than just coming to church, and singing some hymns, and listening to a sermon. Those things are important, but if our worship and service to God is to be real, it must be from the hearts.

In the middle of the soloist's number at church, a young boy tugged on his grandfather's sleeve and whispered, *"She can't sing very well, can she?"*

Knowing the woman had a deep love for the Lord, the grandpa said, *"Son, she sings from her heart. That's what makes it good."* He nodded thoughtfully.

Several days later as the grandson and his grandmother was singing along with the car radio. In between songs, He said, *"Nana, you sing from your heart, don't you?"*

Worship and service that does not come from our heart is worthless. That's when we love Him enough to listen to Him, and desire His glory above all other things.

As an example of what God wants, He gives a commendation to the faithful priest:

2. A Commendation (4-7)

A. They are people of character (4-6). God refers back to the priestly covenant with the family of Aaron (who were from the tribe of Levi). The calling of the priests was to bring life and peace both to themselves and the nation of Israel. The priests' attitude of reverence and the fear of the Lord would be an example to others of how they were to worship and serve God. His lifestyle was to reflect the holiness of God so that others would be inspired to worship and serve God as well.

B. They were to be faithful witnesses of God's Word (7). In this verse, God zeros in on the responsibility of the priest to be messenger of the Word of God. They were ones who followed the command of Paul, given thousands of years later:

2 Tim. 2:15 (NIV) *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."*

In Malachi's day, the priest was supposed to be the one the people could count on to show God's Word to be true by what he said and by how he lived. People should have been able to come to the priest and find out

what God has to say about anything.

The same is true for us today as New Testament priests. We should be people who live lives that demonstrate the presence and power of God so that people look at us and it inspires them to want to worship and serve God. We must be students of God's Word, and able to help others through it. We must be faithful messengers who are able to proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom to everyone we meet.

Now if that sound like something that is too hard, you'd better reexamine your Christianity because that is exactly what God has called us to do. Our lifestyles should reflect the values and truths of the Word of God and the Character of God.

Ask yourselves the following questions: Am I living a life of holiness? Do my words, my activities, and my relationships reflect a life of holiness? Can people see what kind of God I serve just by being around me?

Am I a student of His Word? Can I tell people the truth about what God has to say about the issues that they face? Can I take the Word of God and lead someone to Christ?

You know, people don't need another opinion, they need the truth. And a faithful Christian should seek to worship and serve God by knowing, living, and sharing the truth of God with anyone. That is part of what being a faithful New Testament priest is all about. Unfortunately, there are some who choose to be unfaithful to their calling. God describes them next:

3. A Condemnation (8-9)

A. They cause others to stumble. (8a) Instead of leading others to follow God by their words and their lives, they cause others to stumble into sin. Do you know what sinners think when they see a Christian who does not honor God? They think it's all right for them not to honor God. They see apathetic Christians, so they don't care either. There are Christians, like these priests, who are still performing the rituals- they are still saying prayers, they are still serving God outwardly, but they are leading people away from God instead of leading them to God.

B. They corrupt the covenant. (8b) As a result of their halfhearted worship and apathetic attitudes, they were corrupting the purpose of God's covenant. God doesn't want folks to keep rules out of fear. The purpose of God's covenant was to produce a love from the heart between man and God.

C. Their hypocrisy will become evident. (9) As a result of their unfaithfulness to God, He promises that it would be exposed. They'd lose their respect and their influence to lead anyone to Christ. Jesus described them like this in **Matthew 5:13 (NIV)** *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."*

Karl Rahner wrote, *"The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable."*

It's a shame that the very people who should be leading the lost to Christ are turning them away by their hypocrisy. There was a man in my former church who said the reason he stayed lost for so many years was because he'd seen too many Sunday Christians. He said they'd go to church on Sunday and come to work on Monday and talk the same filthy language, tell the same dirty jokes, and do the same ungodly things they'd always done. *"But,"* he said, *"they were church going folks. They claimed to love the Lord."*

Listen, lost people aren't looking for perfection from Christians- but they are looking for consistency. Some people judge what is right and wrong before God by what they see you do. Are you helping someone to come to Christ, or putting stumbling blocks in their way? Is it a serious responsibility God has given us.

Conclusion: The challenge before us is to set our lives apart to worship and serve Him. God has called us to live like a citizen of His kingdom, with not only the rights, but also the responsibilities:

- The responsibility to live a holy life everywhere we go.
- The responsibility to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- And the responsibility to live like God is real in our lives.

That is our responsibility.