

# Imperatives for Holiness

## 4:4-6

*“Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (4:4-6).*

Someone has said, “Malachi is like a late evening which brings a long day to a close, but he is also like a morning’s dawn which brings with it the promise of a new and more glorious day.” Our text, Malachi 4:4-6, comprises the closing paragraph of the Old Testament Scriptures. These verses actually serve better as an introduction to the New Testament rather than the conclusion to the Old. This is true because we find the emphasis is upon the holiness of one’s inner character. Actually the entire prophecy has focused upon the urgency of a holy character as opposed to external practices. This is not to say that external practices do not matter, for they do. But external practices without an inner holiness are damning. Thus Malachi’s prophecy has stressed the necessity of proper external practice because of an internal dedication. This is the message of God’s “New Covenant” as described in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

After Malachi closed the message he received from God, four hundred years passed in silence before the Almighty God spoke again. These

final words offered Israel guidelines that would guard the nation’s holiness during the long interim.

These last verses are a fitting summary of Malachi’s prophecy. They tell of the urgency of being found holy before God. Failure to be holy would bring divine wrath. Malachi closed by emphasizing what Israel must do if they were to escape the curse and enjoy salvation. His exhortation was to last four hundred years until “Elijah” (i.e., John) appeared. But these words are still applicable today. They are so designed by inspiration that they continue to offer encouragement to all who strive to live a holy life.

God’s insistence on holiness has not lessened, for He still demands all to be holy. But man’s diligence in pursuing holiness has lessened. Many Christians stand alongside ancient Israel in unconcern about holiness. All should be impressed with Malachi’s imperative reasons for developing holiness. It is as if Malachi was giving Israel one last prod toward holiness.

In these closing words we find four reasons which explain why we should be holy.

### **WE MUST REMEMBER GOD’S LAW (4:4)**

Malachi stressed that Israel had a duty to perform if they wanted to escape the terrible “day” of 4:1. “Remember the law of Moses” was the demand. This “law” was the standard and authority for their practice. It contained the covenant’s guidelines. Israel’s problem had

arisen because she failed to show God the honor required by His law (1:5; 3:7). Failure to remember His law had led to atrocious worship practices which incensed God (1:10). When Malachi used the term “statutes and ordinances,” he reminded Israel that they had obligated themselves to follow God’s law.

We also have the obligation to follow the “blessed man” of Psalms 1:2 and constantly meditate upon God’s law. A daily remembrance of His law will restore devotion and direction to our lives (Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:15).

We are not expected to follow the same covenant as Israel, for the “new covenant” became effective when it replaced the “old” on the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:6-12; 10:9). But the principle which Malachi focused upon is just as binding on us who are under the new covenant (Hebrews 10:28, 29).

Forgetfulness was disastrous to Israel and it remains a deadly enemy to Christians. It is the source of every evil practice (Jeremiah 3:21; 2:32; Proverbs 2:17; Isaiah 65:11). The Hebrews writer warned the brethren to not just learn the “basics” and then forget them and regress (Hebrews 5:12). Many have done this, though. They began with wholehearted devotion, but something caused them to forget God’s law. Soon they had regressed just as Israel had (cf. Hebrews 6:1-8).

If we are to be “holy,” it is imperative to remember God’s law!

### **WE MUST FOLLOW GOD’S COMMANDS (4:5)**

It is one thing to know God’s law and another to know and follow His law! Malachi called for Israel to show obedience to God’s commands. Such dedication would deprive them of certain worldly pleasures by calling them to a stringent sacrifice. But God encouraged self-denial by offering a reward for obedience. This promise focused on “Elijah.” When “Elijah” appeared, the self-denial of Israel would be rewarded. If Israel chose selfishness instead of self-denial, a “curse” would come instead of a reward.

God told Israel that He was taking action to avert the curse. A messenger would come to warn and instruct. This messenger was John the baptizer (Matthew 17:10-13).

The demands of God for holiness are always coupled with provisions by God to accomplish

obedience. God demanded that Israel be holy so they would escape “the day” of 4:1. To accomplish this He sent John. God demands holiness for His followers today so we will escape the terror of “the day” of judgment. In order to help us be “holy,” God has provided help (Romans 12:1, 2; Titus 2:11-14; etc.). He has given us promises and provisions (2 Peter 3:11-14).

Christians must remember God’s promises because those promises will enable us to follow His laws.

### **WE MUST BE WITH THOSE OF LIKE FAITH (4:6a)**

John’s ministry was designed to accomplish a reunion. The word “restore” referred to harmony with God. The “fathers” represent the ancestors of Israel who were devoted to God (cf. 3:4). These had served Jehovah with great faith. But their “children,” those descendants in Malachi’s day, had erred and fallen away. The “fathers” could not be united with the “children.” This union was impossible because a common love for God was lacking. “Elijah,” or John, was to correct this division by drawing all together in righteousness (Luke 1:16, 17). As righteousness became the practice, then all would be united in a common devotion to God. This devotion would enable holiness to be seen (Matthew 17:11).

We live in a society that is an enemy to God. Those who fail to love God are separated from those who do. How wonderful it is to see those united in the fellowship of Ephesians 2:11-22 and thus find the encouragement to live holy lives. When we join with others to serve God, the hatred and ugliness surrounding us in the world will be overcome and holiness will reign in our lives. This is why it is imperative for Christians to attend worship assemblies with the brethren (Hebrews 10:25).

### **WE MUST REALIZE THE SOMBER PENALTY OF FAILURE (4:6b)**

Malachi closed his message with an unbelievable note—a “curse” is pronounced! He had mentioned several times the dread of facing God in an unholy condition. Now he adds further emphasis as he used the word “curse.” Literally, this referred to the “ban” calling for total extermination (Leviticus 27:29; Deuteronomy 13:16,

17). Whatever was placed under this “ban” was destroyed (Deuteronomy 12:29). Thus the term indicates that all who fail to develop holiness will be without hope when “the day” arrives.

Here we come face to face with the dreadfulness of God’s anger. There is a stern side to the gospel about which many are willfully ignorant—Christ is preached as the Savior but also as Judge! For all who fail to demonstrate holiness, there awaits only this tragic penalty (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Certainly, this is an im-

perative for living a “holy” life!

### **CONCLUSION**

“The closing of the Old Testament in Malachi is unspeakably solemn. On its last leaf we find the blessing and the curse, life and death, set before us,” someone has commented.

Malachi’s message closed with four imperative reasons why all should live a “holy” life. God’s people must be holy.

—John Kachelman

### ***Aspects of Judgment*** ***(Malachi 4:1-3)***

1. It is definite—“the day” (4:1).
2. It is discerning—“furnace” (4:1).
3. It is universal—“all,” “every” (4:1).
4. It is rewarding—saints feel joy, but sinners feel pain (4:1, 2).
5. It is vindictive—“tread down the wicked” (4:3).

### ***Reward!*** ***(Malachi 4:1-3)***

God’s saints will ultimately find a blessed reward because of their devotion to God.

1. Their conduct will be rewarded. Having refused arrogance and evil, they chose godliness (4:1).
2. Their foundation will be rewarded (4:2a—“root or branch”; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).
3. Their patience will be rewarded (4:2b; Revelation 6:10, 11).
4. Their trials and abuses will be rewarded (4:3).

### ***God’s Answers to Sinners*** ***(Malachi 4:1-3)***

1. To the arrogant, there will be shame and humility (4:3).
2. To the evil doer, there will be fiery judgment on his deeds (4:1).
3. To the wicked, there will be forced admission of God’s authority, pain, and bondage (4:2).

### ***God’s Gifts for Holiness*** ***(Malachi 4:4-6)***

1. God has given us laws to regulate our lives (4:4).
2. God has given us messengers to warn of the calamity of sin (4:4).
3. God has given us reasoning capabilities to respond to His will (4:6).

### ***Sobering Realities*** ***(Malachi 4:4-6)***

1. The law of God is universal—“all.” Just as the Old Testament applied to “all Israel,” so the New Testament applies to “all nations.” No one is excused from obedience! (2 Thessalonians 1:8).
2. The day of God will be “terrible” to those who fail to heed His Word (4:5).
3. The mercy of God is found by way of “restored hearts.”

### ***Restoration*** ***(Malachi 4:6)***

1. It is prompted by the Word of God (4:4, 5).
2. It is urged by the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (4:5b).
3. It is to be practiced by *all*—“fathers, children” (4:6).
4. It is designed to save one from the curse of impenitence (4:6b).