

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Pastor Stephen Felker
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
October 13, 2003

Malachi 2:10-16 “How to Have a Lasting Marriage”

Intro. In the first 9 verses of this chapter, the prophet continues the rebuke against the spiritual leadership of the people of Israel. Then, starting with v.10, the prophet is not just addressing the priests, but all of Israel. Together, both the spiritual leaders and the people were guilty of two serious charges, both of which relate to marriage.

I have chosen to preach only from the last half of chapter 2 today because several Christian groups have designed this week as “Marriage Protection Week.” Due to a recent Supreme Court decision, there is great concern that marriage in this country will be weakened even further by permitting, or even mandating by court action, the inclusion of homosexual marriages. I believe the Bible is unmistakably clear that marriage is a divine institution, created by God, between one man and one woman. I believe we should exercise our voice as citizens and encourage our elected officials to affirm this long-standing foundation of the home, which is the foundation of a good society.

Even though I see a genuine threat against marriage by the homosexual activists, I must say that the greater threat against marriage is carried on by heterosexuals themselves! The institution of marriage has been under heavy assault by the forces of evil for the past 50 years, and there has been a tremendous increase in the number of children growing up without a stable, loving home parented by *both* mom and dad. And the sad thing is that the incidence of divorce among professing Christians is just about as great as those who do not profess Christ. So until we do a better job of preserving and protecting marriage without our own people, we will not have much authority to prevent the further erosion of marriage by homosexual activists and other liberals.

Now this morning I am going to draw from Malachi three fundamental principles of marriage that will go a long way toward preserving and protecting marriage.

I. WE MUST ONLY MARRY BELIEVERS

V.11 says, “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned The LORD’S holy *institution* which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god.” The prophet accuses the people of profaning something that is holy, set apart as special to the Lord. It is also described as something the Lord loves. Based on v.10 we could say that the Lord has in mind the covenant that He established with Israel, and with the tribe of Levi. In that covenant, Israel agreed to worship the Lord alone, and not worship other gods. God commanded the Jews to be a separate people, not because they were better than any other nation, but because He had a very special task for them to perform, and to minimize temptation to worship other gods. Yet, one sin that led to much idolatry is found in the last of v.11, “He has married the daughter of a foreign god.” The men saw the beautiful foreign girls who lived around them when they returned from the Captivity. So they were leaving their wives and marrying these foreign girls who served heathen, pagan deities, and brought idolatry into the nation. Now the basic issue was not race, for humans are humans whether they are Jews or Midianites. The basic issue was loyalty to the God of Israel and the maintaining of a godly home.

We see this same thing all the way through the Word of God. I believe this is the situation

in Genesis 6:1-7 where we are told that the sons of God were marrying the daughters of men. This marks the beginning of the breaking down of the godly line of Seth as they intermarried with the ungodly line of Cain. We see this happening again when the children of Israel were nearing the Promised Land. They wanted to marry the daughters of Moab. They did intermarry, and this brought the idolatry of Moab into Israel. Solomon married many foreign women, and they turned his heart away from God, and he even worshiped some pagan deities along with these wives (Neh. 13:26). Again after the kingdom of Israel was divided, the idolatry of Phoenicia was introduced into the northern kingdom by the marriage of Ahab with Jezebel. Now this was happening again in Malachi's day!

It is the same old story that is being re-enacted in our day. I'll keep on saying that a believer and an unbeliever ought not to get married. 2 Cor. 6:14 says that we are not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. You can and should be friendly toward unbelievers, and do good unto them, but you are asking for trouble if you marry an unbeliever. They are more likely to bring you down spiritually than you are to lift them up spiritually. Now if you are married to an unbeliever, you should not seek or initiate a divorce according to 1 Cor. 7 and 1 Peter 3. Marriage is still to be preserved if at all possible. However, if the unbeliever commits adultery, or wants out, Paul says you are not under bondage in such cases.

II. WE MUST PROMOTE A LASTING, HEALTHY MARRIAGE

In the last of v.14 through the first part of v.15, Malachi applies the principles of marriage to explain why divorce violates those principles. I want to look at these in reverse order. These 3 principles will promote a lasting, healthy marriage:

A. Understand that Marriage Is a Union – In v.15a the prophet said, “And did not he make one?” This goes back to the original creation of man and woman. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,¹ and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). God's ideal for man from the very beginning was that there should be one woman for one man for life. Man was just a half, and he needed the other half, woman so that together they could be one. He was incomplete without woman. God designed marriage to create a physical, emotional, and spiritual union between a husband and wife.

You need to do everything that promotes and preserves the union that God designed into marriage. You need to promote regular physical union. There should be much sharing in the physical realm. Do things together. Work as a team on things of mutual interest. Promote emotional union. Express love often. Finally, promote spiritual oneness. Go to church together. Pray together.

B. Understand that Marriage Is a Covenant –Notice at the end of v. 14 that the woman is called “your wife by covenant.” This may be the only place in the Bible that specifically calls marriage a covenant. His Hebrew wife was the one with whom he stood before the priest and covenanted to be faithful and true to her. The words, “because Jehovah was witness between thee and the wife of thy youth,” refer to the fact that the marriage took place before the face of God, or with looking up to God. If the marriage was a covenant of God, as described in Prov. 2:17, it was also concluded before the face of God, and God was a witness to the marriage. Brides and grooms must remember that God is an unseen witness at every wedding, and He also witnesses those who live together who aren't married. Here we see that marriage is a binding covenant agreement. God

¹ This removes mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law from the new family.

is a covenant keeping God, and He expects us to keep covenant commitments. Aren't you glad that God keeps His covenants with you! Ross T. Bender said, "A covenant cannot be terminated. It can only be violated" (#C-321).

A lasting marriage is not based upon romantic love, but upon commitment. Love in the best and highest sense is not a feeling, but a commitment to a person through thick and thin, the good times and the bad times, in sickness and in health, from good looks to not so good looks. This kind of love keeps a marriage together.

C. Marriage Is Preserved through Regular Companionship – In v.14b God calls the wife a man's "companion." This was God plan from the beginning. In Genesis 2:18 God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Do you know why God created Adam first? It was to allow him time to realize that he needed someone else! It had been said that God took Eve from Adam's side to be his equal and to be his companion, to walk by his side. She came from near his heart so that he would love her. She is to be his helper, and companion.

Once again, to protect and preserve marriage, we must do everything we can to promote this principle. We need to make time to spend with our spouses. Do things together. Guard against schedules that keep the two of you apart too often, whether they be work schedules, or extracurricular activities.

These three principles were laid down from the very beginning of marriage. Then sin entered into the world. It marred everything, including the relationship in marriage. When we get to the time of Moses and the Law, we find that divorce was permitted. This does not mean that it was God's intention but He permitted it, as Jesus said, because of the hardness of man's heart (Deut. 24:1). As years passed, the interpretation of that law regarding "uncleanness" had become so broad that even if a wife burned the biscuits, that would be grounds for divorce. In fact, those in Malachi's day were abusing divorce. So I want to conclude this message about marriage by saying:

III. WE MUST AVOID DIVORCE IF AT ALL POSSIBLE

This is especially true in terms of *initiating* divorce to marry another, which is what our text addresses. The wife who had been the companion of a sacred covenant, who had borne children to her husband and who had shared his joys and sorrows, his hardships and days of darkness, now was being rejected for a heathen woman, a worshiper of foreign deities! Notice what these divorced women were doing. V. 13a says, "You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying." Though this could refer to the men's own tears while offering sacrifices, it is more likely that this is a reference to the tears of their wives. The wives who were being divorced came to the altar weeping. As a result, v. 13 goes on to say, "So He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands." Offering sacrifice while at the same time committing willful sin is unacceptable to God. In 1 Peter 3:7 he tells husbands to treat our wives right, "lest your prayers be hindered."

Notice in v.16 that God says that He hates divorce. That is the strongest statement in the Bible regarding divorce. Divorce for reasons other than those given in Scripture, even though legal, grieves the heart of God.

Notice the reasons given here why God hates divorce, especially the kind described here:

1. Divorce Violates Young Love – Twice in this text, in vv. 14 & 15b, the wives are called "wife of your youth." With this expression, the prophet appeals to the heart of the husband,

pointing to the love of his youth when the marriage had been entered into. Remember how much you used to love her? Also this implies that they had been married a long time, and yet he divorces her, probably to marry someone younger and better looking.

This is still happening today. These men reach mid-life, and it seems their dreams aren't being fulfilled. He can't compete athletically like he used to. But yet, he still wants to show that he still "has it." Some young lady comes into his life and seems attracted to him. He goes home and once again is reminded that his wife is just getting older, and seems less attractive to him. Of course she is! She is tired from washing his clothes, raising his children, and cooking his meals all these years. Too many men have cast off the wife of their youth and God hates it!

2. Divorce Breaks an Important Union – From v.15 we have already seen that God designed marriage to create a physical, emotional, and spiritual union between two people. In fact, God talks about marriage as two people being "joined" together. Now when you glue 2 items together, and you break them apart, what happens? You damage one or both of the items. That's why divorce hurts so much. That's why the death of a spouse hurts so much. You may experience some hurt in your marriage, but before you choose divorce, you had better think about the greater hurt you will experience when you divorce.

By the way, this is one reason why sexual immorality is so harmful. Paul indicated in 1 Cor. 6:15-16 that sex itself creates a bond between two people. When a person has multiple sex partners, they experience a tear in their emotional health with each change in partners.

In 2002 Baptist Press reported on a study, the first of its kind, that found no evidence that unhappily married adults who divorced were typically any happier than unhappily married people who stayed married. Researchers, led by University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite, also determined that two-thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported that their marriages were happy five years later. Divorce did not typically reduce symptoms of depression or raise self-esteem, the study found. The study debunks the popularly held notion that divorce is the answer to marital unhappiness [#C-467].

Now the next reason God hates divorce is probably the most significant:

3. Divorce Tends to Damage Your Children's Spiritual and Emotional Well-being – In v.15 we see one of the main reasons why God created marriage, "He seeks godly offspring." Anyone desiring to have a godly or holy posterity would not have put away his Hebrew wife and married a heathen woman. Too often men or women fail to consider fully the consequences of divorce upon the children. But some people object, "Well I have to think about myself and what best for me." My response is that you should have thought of that before you had children, not after. Children have a right to come home knowing that mom and dad are going to be there.

The authors of that study I just mentioned said that divorce, while eliminating some stresses and sources of potential harm, may create other problems -- such as adverse reactions of children. For example, a team of researchers from the Oregon Social Learning Center has found that parental divorce plays a direct role in fostering sexual experimentation among adolescents. The investigators tracked the behavior of 201 junior high and high school boys who lived in "higher-crime areas." They found that boys who had sexual intercourse at an early age tended to be those who had experienced two or more "parental transitions," e.g., divorce, remarriage or repartnering. Only 18 percent of these promiscuous boys came from intact families. By contrast, 57 percent of the virgins came from homes where divorce had not occurred. A similar study was conducted on young women by sociologist Lawrence L. Wu of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He studied 3,716 women and found a strong correlation between those who bore babies out of wedlock and those who had been through a "change in family structure" growing up. We concluded that the

stresses of divorce and/or remarriage on children are directly implicated in out-of-wedlock childbearing. In study after study now, we are seeing that divorce, single parenting, and family disruption are unhealthy for children. This is not to criticize those who find themselves in those circumstances, but neither can we continue to deny that intact, two-parent families are the most healthy and contribute directly to a stable society.²

4. Divorce Damages Your Own Spiritual Well-being – Another reason for condemning the divorce is given. Notice in v.16 that God “hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence.” Wickedness will adhere irremovably to such a man. A soiled garment is a symbol of uncleanness of heart (cf. Zech. 3:4; Isa. 44:5; Rev. 3:4, 7:14). There may be another interpretation. In modern Western society, a man puts an engagement ring on a woman's finger to propose marriage, but in ancient Israel, he placed a corner of his garment over her (Ezek. 16:8; Ruth 3:9). If a man divorces his wife, instead of having a garment that symbolized love, he had a garment that symbolized violence. Either way, initiating divorce is a sin that defiles a person spiritually.

Folks, there are serious consequences for not upholding God's plan for marriage, both for your family, and for society. Dr. Paul Cameron and colleagues conducted research on 6,714 obituaries from 16 U.S. homosexual journals from 1981-1993 as compared to a large sample of obituaries from regular newspapers. The median age of death of married men was 75. The median age of death of unmarried or divorced men was 57. Less than 2% of homosexuals survived to 65. Homosexuals were 116 times more likely to be murdered and 24 times more likely to commit suicide [#C-196]. That ought to tell you something!

The problem that was prevalent in Israel at the time of Malachi is prevalent in our contemporary culture today. Strong families begin with strong marriages, a man and a woman who love each other and want to live each for the other and both for the Lord. Anything less than that is less than God's will.

Conclusion: On December 19, 1982, Jill William's looked at her husband Pat, general manager of the Philadelphia 76ers, and said so quietly he almost couldn't hear, “I just don't care anymore. I hate this marriage. It's boring me to death. I give up. I don't even know if I love you anymore. I don't know if I ever loved you.” Ten years of neglect had resulted in a wife who was emotionally dead. Pat committed himself to saving the marriage. Jill didn't care. Pat went to doctor Ed Wheat for help. Here is what Dr. Wheat said about their case: “Without love, Jill was dying emotionally, and Pat was crushed to the ground. But two factors made the difference, and these will make the difference in any troubled marriage. First, because Pat and Jill were Christians, committed to obeying God's Word, they did not entertain the thought of divorce, even at the lowest ebb of their relationship. Second, Pat committed himself to winning his wife's love and he went about it in a Biblical way. It was through consistent, loving, determined application of what we call the B.E.S.T. - Blessing, Edifying, Sharing, and Touching. Even when there was no response at all, over a period of many months, Pat restored his marriage. In the process he found himself falling in love with his wife - a God-fueled romantic love for her that continues to grow in depth and intensity.” Two years to the day after that crisis, Pat found this note from his wife: Dear Pat, I love you so much for your response to that darkest hour two years ago...that you would share your name, life, love, and yourself with me is truly my dream come true. There aren't enough words to express my love and devotion to you - I am the most blessed of all women. Love, Jill. (Told by Steve Jones; #C-522.]

² Excerpted from Dr. Dobson's book Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide [#C-284].

Sources: C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 10/23/89); Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be" Series: *Old Testament, Malachi: Be Amazed* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1996); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

This document has not been transcribed from an audio recording, but is the result of the sermon preparation process. Most outlines are original to the author, but much of the content of the notes are taken from commentaries, other sermons, and Bible study aids (see sources above). Sermons are preached without notes, and thus the content of the "live" sermon is in the author's own words. To get an audio recording of this message, you may send \$1 for each audio cassette tape ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834.