

THE BOOK OF MALACHI - Prophetic Words for a Love For God Starting to Grow Cold

Part seven - Sunday, March 18th, 2012, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1548

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MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD (continued) - **Malachi 2:13-16** - "And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. [14] But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. [15] Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. [16] "For the man who hates and divorces, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

It's interesting that this passage about divorce doesn't start directly talking about divorce. It starts by examining a people who can't approach God with a glad heart. They still felt they needed God. They kept making their **approach** to the altar. But they couldn't seem to remember why they came. As is **always** the case, God begins dealing with the people at the point they were choosing to ignore while continuing to offer their sacrifices.

- 1) **MALACHI IS DEALING WITH A VERY SPECIFIC SIN IN THESE VERSES** - He's talking very specifically to men who get tired of their wives and trade them in on younger, newer models. A woman could never divorce her husband. She never had any power to do so. That's why both Malachi and Jesus only talk about men who divorce their wives.

In that day, men were the initiators of all divorce. And they could divorce for very little reason. And as time went by, a hardness of heart would set in. People would, without any feeling of guilt whatsoever, plan their next step in getting rid of their spouse in the same way you would plan to change coats when you get home:

Malachi 2:16 - "For the man who hates and divorces, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Jesus approached the subject of divorce in exactly the same way: **Matthew 5:27-32** - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.[31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Do you think it's an accident that Jesus' words about divorce fall right on the heels of His teaching on lust? He sees these men and knows what's in their hearts. He knows they're just trying to use the teaching of Moses to ditch one wife for a woman they've found to be a little more appealing.

- 2) **WHY IS DIVORCE SUCH A TERRIBLE SIN?** - **Malachi 2:13-14** - "And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. [14] But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

People know that marriage is a covenant between two people. Malachi reminds them that marriage is actually a covenant between **three** partners. The covenant is made before God. He signs every marriage certificate. We say it at every wedding. "**Whom therefore God had joined together....**" The **wedding** belongs to the bride and groom. How many groomsmen, how many bridesmaids, what color flowers, what music, and on and on. But the **marriage** is **God's**.

There are many places in Scripture that reflect this divine reality in marriage. Here's one: **Proverbs 2:16-17** - "So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, [17] who forsakes the companion of her youth and **forgets the covenant of her God....**" Notice, "**who....forgets the covenant of her God....**" You turn your back on God in a covenant breaking way.

- 3) **GUARD YOURSELF IN YOUR SPIRIT** - **Malachi 2:15-16** - "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So **guard yourselves in your spirit**, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. [16] "For the man who hates and divorces, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So **guard yourselves in your spirit**, and do not be faithless."

"**Guard yourselves in your spirit.**" This phrase is repeated twice for emphasis. Be careful not to allow those reckless intentions in your heart to go unchecked by the Word of God. Impulses come to all of us. But please notice - you guard your own life when you listen to the Lord. You don't just guard you marriage. You don't just please God. You guard your own life.

Divorce begins in the mind. It becomes a possibility in the thought life long before any papers are signed. In most cases - perhaps as high as 90 percent - divorce is entertained because at least one partner has already committed his heart to another partner. That is why churches can talk very few Christians out of divorce. When you've **already given your heart to someone else**, neither reason nor Scripture verses can make you take it back. The trick is to guard your heart much earlier on in the process. **There's a pattern to all sin** -

but it's especially true in marital unfaithfulness and divorce:

- a) **Tempting circumstances arise** - At some point, the heart wasn't prepared for something that came along life's track. Neither **David nor Bathsheba** had any plans of adultery when they got up to go about their daily routine that day. Those kinds of circumstances will come down the pipe to every child of God who has drawn breath.
- b) **Circumstances appeal to desire** - It doesn't have to be the desire for an affair. It may just be the desire to be instantly free from what you have been carrying around of the burden of your marriage - the desire to get out. You can see that there is a door that up until now you have kept closed, but there seems to be light under it. You start to entertain forbidden options.
- c) **Desire always creates a fantasy** - Because your mind has been blinded by desire, rational thought goes out the window. You begin to paint a picture of the unrestrained freedom and peace and bliss that will be yours once you get out of this marriage. After all, we never really loved each other anyway. I don't think we were ever really married in God's eyes in the first place.
- d) **The fantasy cries out for action** - The first thing you become is a liar. To live a lie you must tell lies. Lying becomes like eating potato chips. You can't stop with just one. Once honorable Christian people now look their spouses straight in the eye and lie about their schedules, their work hours, their appointments, their expenditures. The desire to get out of the marriage cuts to the very core of personal integrity.

4) **BUT I'VE ALREADY BEEN DIVORCED AND AM REMARRIED - WHAT SHOULD I DO?** - I want so much not to be misunderstood in this sermon. I've been preaching from a text that deals with a people who were deserting their wives to find better ones, all the while trying to pretend that God didn't care and they could just pick up their worship of Him again whenever they pleased. Now I want to close by dealing with some very different situations:

- a) **There's the person who was divorced before coming to Jesus Christ as Savior.** And I feel very strongly about what I'm going to say next: It is diminishing to the power of the cross to even hint that some sins stain so deeply that the blood of Jesus never does quite get them out. This is to fundamentally belittle and reject all that the New Testament says about the unbelievable power of the blood of Jesus Christ.
- b) **There are people who have been divorced by their partner.** - They weren't looking for a divorce. They wanted to keep their marriage together and whole. They found themselves in situations that were no longer in their control. And to you too, I offer words of encouragement. No church has the right to punish one person for another's sin. God never treats us that way. And nor would I.
- c) **Whatever marriage you are in, it must be your last.** God wants your marriage to work. If you're divorced, there's no going back. If you're in your third marriage **you must be faithful in it and make it strong.**

Jesus Himself recognized the validity of **second and third marriages**. He didn't consider them adulterous relationships - **John 4:15-18** - "The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." [16] Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." [17] The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

He didn't say, "You've had one husband and four adulterous relationships." Make your present marriage strong in the Lord. Never entertain any thought of divorce. Be faithful in your heart toward your spouse.

5) **CONCLUSION** - If you are married, your marriage is the fountain of everything else you will be before the Lord. It forms the foundation of your devotion, your prayer, your worship, your honesty, your purity. You can't please Him in anything else if you bring an unscriptural heart to the covenant of your marriage.