

THE BOOK OF MALACHI - When Spiritual Intimacy Feels Elusive - Pt 6
Sunday, December 4th, 2022, 5:30 p.m.
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MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Malachi 2:11-12 - “Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. [12] May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!”

Two sins are dealt with in the next six verses of chapter 2. The first has to do with ***entering marriage***, the second has to do with ***getting out of marriage***. The first has to do with ***marrying pagan wives***, the second has to do with ***forsaking and divorcing a wife after years of marriage***.

It's hard preaching from a text like this. It's hard addressing subjects like this in today's church. It's hard because both the Bible and our Lord Jesus Himself, approach the subject of human sin and failure from ***two perspectives***:

- a) ***First, a standard of holiness is made clear***. Teaching is laid out. Commandments are given. Examples and patterns are set down to be noticed and learned from. Warnings are issued as to what the consequences will be if the commands are broken.

- b) ***Second, unbelievable, creative, renewing grace is offered to those who will repent of their sin and turn to Christ.*** Sinners don't get what they deserve. Jesus bears the penalty of our guilt and rebellion. People are offered new hope and set back on their feet. The Psalmist caught a glimpse of this when he said that **"He (God) has not dealt with us after our iniquities"**(Psalm 103:10). We don't get justice from God. We get pardon and a clean slate.

Holding these two sides - these two perspectives - together is the hardest job of ministry in the church. It's hard because Christians tend to line up and form themselves into camps on one side of the issue or the other. And there are real dangers in proclaiming one side of God's truth without the other.

- a) ***There are those who just proclaim the holiness of God.*** "This is what the Word teaches. This is the unchanging standard of God. If you just go around preaching an easy grace ***people won't care too much about obedience.*** They'll just sin as much as they like and ask for God's forgiveness so they can get off the hook."

And so above all else, the standard of holiness must be protected. God doesn't compromise and the church shouldn't either.

- b) ***There are those who see all of the broken lives who have already run amuck of God's standard of holiness.*** And they want so badly to reach out to them in grace that they no longer truly believe that it matters whether God is obeyed at all.

"God is love" becomes their watchword. Grace becomes a convenient sentimental rinse for doing my own thing whenever I want. And they go to this extreme because they've seen the rod of God's holiness used in many churches simply to pound a failing brother or sister into the ground without hope or new life. So each side is trying to protect something very precious. But each has missed the mark of the whole of the will of God.

And so I want to start these two messages making some things very clear:

- a) ***If you are one of those who has experienced the pain of living with an unsaved spouse or have already gone through divorce or divorce and remarriage*** I would not, for anything, add one ounce of condemnation or pain to your circumstances. I want to you know that you do not hold some second class slot in this body of believers. You are not barred from membership or ministry in this church. Your past is as much erased as mine in the blood of Jesus.

- b) But if you are ***presently contemplating either of these actions*** - marrying an unsaved partner or divorcing your present partner - the Word of God has serious warnings that you need to hear and heed. You need to be reminded that following Jesus means obeying Jesus. And that His commands always lead in the path of life. Breaking them always leads to destruction.

Now to our subject - the marrying of unsaved partners:

1) GOD SAYS THIS IS AN ABOMINATION

It's called an ***“abomination”*** and a ***“profane”*** act in **verse 11** - **“Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.”**

The prophet shows it to be detestable on ***two accounts***:

- a) ***It was detestable because of who the people were committing this sin.*** In no uncertain terms we made aware that ***Judah*** has been faithless and abomination has been committed in ***Israel***. And the emphasis isn't accidental. They were a distinct people, a separate people, called by God. This distinction was to mark all of their earthly existence, not just the religious portion of their activities. Everything they did was to be seen as touched by the ownership of their Creator.

- b) ***It was detestable because of what God had already done for these people.*** That's the reason for those specific reminders that ***“Judah has been faithless....”*** and ***“....an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.”***

Notice that specific reference to the city of Jerusalem. They were now back in their city by God's grace from Babylonian captivity. They knew they had just been brought back by God's grace to Jerusalem. God had again been nothing but kind to this rebellious people. No other nation had been so treated by God. In other words, God had once again proven His **faithfulness** to His people. He hadn't deserted them. What had His kindness and goodness done to their hearts? Had it won their gratitude? Had it made their wills more yielded to His rule?

No. They were, if anything, more sinful and cold hearted in the face of God's kindness to them. God's **kindness** made them **careless**. (Put a little red tag by that sentence. We'll use it later.)

2) **IN MARRYING PAGAN WIVES THEY WERE BREAKING FAITH WITH GOD AND PROFANING HIS SANCTUARY**

Malachi 2:11 - "Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god."

Perhaps this is a good place to make clear that the sin God was speaking of in these verses ***had nothing to do with marrying people of another race***. The Bible is very clear that many foreigners left Egypt with the children of Israel. ***They could marry any whom they chose as long as they committed themselves to the worship of the true God of Israel.***

The sin being dealt with here is a **religious sin**, not a **racial** one. The people of Judah were marrying those who had **no faith in the true God or who worshiped false gods**.

3) **NOW JUMP ACROSS THE YEARS AND SEE HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT PICKS UP THIS SAME THEME**

The New Testament gives specific instructions on marrying unbelievers. And it does so from both a **before** and **after** perspective.

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 - "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?"

1 Corinthians 7:39 - "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

Why does the Bible put such emphasis in this point? Because nothing shows the state of your heart more than your choice of a marriage partner. Marriage is the fountain of everything else that will come to be of your life. You can't separate it from any of your other goals or aspirations.

Notice the scope of Paul's question - "What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" Listen, dear one, there is only one correct answer to that question. ***Nothing. Ultimately nothing.***

"Well, Pastor Don, I know we have some different views on spiritual things. But that's the only difference."

And in that statement you've proven to me that you have no understanding about what the Christian life is all about. You prove that you think of the Lordship of Jesus Christ as belonging to some religious compartment of your life, while the rest of your life is your own. You've moved Christ from the ***center*** to the ***edge*** of your decision-making process.

Do you see my point? That's why I said nothing shows the state of your heart more than your choice of a marriage partner. If you're willing to marry an unbeliever you're proving you have no real grasp or taste of the Christian life in the first place.

"But Pastor Don, we have so many other things in common"

Listen to me. If you're serious about following Jesus, apart from a romantic attraction to that other person, you have ***nothing*** else in common.

"But I just really like his sense of humor." Really? Does it glorify Jesus Christ? "No, but it's clean." But you're not interested in just being clean. The passion of your heart is to glorify Jesus Christ. And your unsaved friend can't even relate to that.

"But he has such a good job and is a hard worker and will make a lot of money." Yes, but none of those things is the **goal** of your life if you're following Jesus. You're not here just trying to save lots of money. You're trying to glorify God, advance the Kingdom of God, and reach the lost.

"But he's just so much fun to be with." He may be. Pursuing fun is really all he has to live for. But you're not here just to have fun. You're here to obey and please Jesus, to lay down your life for Him at all costs and to prepare for eternity. That's not even on his mind.

And if you don't see those distinctions then you never have really come to terms with what the Christian life is all about. You're just trying to be religious. You're not thinking in terms of new life. And Jesus isn't Lord in your heart.

4) **THE COST OF LINKING YOUR HEART WITH AN UNBELIEVER**

Malachi 2:12 - "May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!"

Notice those last words - "***...who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!***" That's a telling phrase. These people want to pursue their own agenda and inclinations in choosing a marriage partner then continue to come and worship and bring their sacrifices to the Lord in His house. In other words, they want to make their own decision about marriage and then assume and expect to continue their relationship with God as though nothing unusual had happened.

These words are so stern for a good reason. God wants them to know their **feelings** of innocence don't **make** them innocent. These people knew from square one that marrying pagan partners was strictly forbidden by God:

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 - "When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, [2] and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. [3] You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, [4] for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly."

That's a long and involved quote. But there a reason it's so important for our study of Malachi. This was not a matter of falling into sin and finding out that they had displeased the Lord. Rather, they knew all along that what they were doing was wrong. They were **planning** on rebelling against the knowledge they had and **then** offering some sacrifices and get God's forgiveness **afterwards** and everything would be just fine. Thank you very much.

In other words, they were sinning ***against clear knowledge***. They were presuming on God's grace. And God tells them that they can come into His house and beg for forgiveness till the cows come home. ***It won't work!*** God's grace leads to ***holiness***, not ***carelessness*** (Remember the red tag by the sentence, "God's ***kindness*** made them ***careless.***").

I'm talking to the person who hasn't married an unbeliever yet, but is ***planning on it in his or her heart***. You know better. You've seen what God's Word says about the subject. If you think you can just go ahead and eventually buy God off with your wonderful Christian life afterwards, you're mistaken. You will short-circuit everything in your walk with Jesus.

5) WHAT IF I'VE ALREADY COMMITTED THIS SIN?

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 - "To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. [13] If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. [14] For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. [15] But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. [16] Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?"

This is so important. Here's an abiding spiritual principle. ***God's grace is activated by repentance in the same way that His wrath is activated by presumption.*** In other words, the person who plans to sin, relying on God's forgiveness at a later date will meet nothing but ruin and wrath. But the person who has committed sin and comes to God with a contrite, humble heart, finds cleansing and new hope.

These are not light truths. They require deep and careful ***listening***. I've actually ended this message right where I started. The church always has ***two messages to proclaim at the same time***. And she never honors God fully if she proclaims just one.

My heart goes out to people who never knew this truth or have foolishly rebelled against it and have joined their lives to an unbeliever. Or, perhaps you were both unsaved and now you have come to the Lord, while your partner is still unredeemed. The Bible makes its point clear. Stay with your partner. I know it takes special grace at times. God will provide it. Love and honor him or her just as much as you can. Pray much. Don't scold or lecture. Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in your life. Get other believers to covenant with you in constant prayer. And never, never lose hope in what God's mighty grace can do in your home!