

**THE BOOK OF MALACHI - When Spiritual Intimacy Feels Elusive - Pt 7**  
**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 5:30 p.m.**

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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."**

First, let me urge you not to pass judgment on this teaching until you hear all of it. There are truths that need to be proclaimed and received in balance with each other.

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. The life and joy have gone out of their walk with God. Malachi says none could make approach to God with a ***cheerful mind***. They were constantly ***sad*** and ***groaned*** (that's the exact word used) before the altar of God - "**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**"(13). And they were like that because they found God to be hard and unhearing.

They still felt they needed God. They kept making their ***approach*** to the altar. But they couldn't seem to remember why they came. There seemed to be no real ***advantage*** in coming. They knew nothing was working properly but could find no light at the end of the tunnel - no way to please God and make him hear their prayers.

What do you talk to people about when their lives get like that? That's where this text has such great impact and relevance. As is ***always*** the case, God begins dealing with the people at the point they were choosing to ignore while they continued to offer their sacrifices. ***They*** weren't thinking about it anymore, but ***God*** was. And so He reminds them, "I want to talk to you about a casual attitude that's developing toward divorce. I want to talk to you about the way you discard the wife of your youth."

There are several things that I want to stress right at the beginning of this message:

- 1) **MALACHI IS DEALING WITH A VERY SPECIFIC SIN IN THESE VERSES**

He's talking 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.**"

Everyone who names Christ has to ask the question. ***Are those words true?*** And if they are, ***do they permanently imprison countless numbers of divorced, re-married Christians?***

Somehow we have to come to terms with this. We will try in just a few minutes.

But before that we need some context to Jesus' words. 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 allowance of Moses to ditch one wife for a woman they've found to be a little more appealing.

Now this passage from Malachi has particular relevance to the people of God today. Both husbands and wives can file for divorce at the drop of a hat. Because of the frequency with which it happens a calloused mind can easily set into the soul of the Body of Christ. It gets very easy for any of us to think that we will just get this "pain-in-the-neck" marriage out of the way. The church will quickly forget, God doesn't really care anyway, and it will be so much easier to get on with life as usual.

After all, I'll still go to church - I'll still have my friends - I'll still tithe and pray and read my Bible. How long can the pain last? And all I can say from studying Malachi is the sin seemed to last in God's mind after the people had forgotten all about it.

## 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. We say it at every wedding - ***"We are gathered together in the sight of God and the presence of these witnesses...."***

My skin crawls when some slick, trendy pastor gets up at the ceremony and says, ***“Wilma and Hank are just so glad you came to celebrate their ‘special day!’”***

***No. We’re all there with them as “witnesses!”*** One day Wilma is going to get sick of Hank - or Hank won’t feel all that excited about an aging Wilma. And they’re going to announce the end of their marriage.

And here’s what’s supposed to happen then. Several hundred people should be texting Wilma or Hank saying, ***“Wait a minute! I was there at your wedding. It wasn’t my idea to ruin that beautiful summer Saturday. I wanted to go golfing. But you wanted me to come as a witness. I heard you vow to love your spouse until you died. That’s what you promised. I witnessed it. What gives?”***

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*** - ***“What therefore God has joined together....”***

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...”*** In other words, when you've made a covenant with the Lord, you don't just divorce a wife. You turn your back on God in a covenant breaking way. No wonder Malachi says the people spill all those tears on the altar for nothing. They didn't just divorce a wife. They've broken covenant with - divorced - their Creator.

### 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 - ***“guard yourselves in your spirit”*** (15,16b).

Notice also where divorce begins and grows - "***Guard yourselves in your spirit***" (15,16). ***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.

And suddenly, there seems to be a breaking point - a way 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.

Then your own mind becomes our own worst enemy. It becomes, with a life all its own, a factory manufacturing ***reasons*** that play into what you desire. 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. Think of the children. They deserve so much better than to see mom and dad fighting all the time. Those thoughts for a very convincing argument in favor of sinful actions.

Or, you imagine the kind of woman you will be able to land once you're free from your marriage. I've counseled hundreds of people who are leaving their present marriage partner. Let me tell you something - the third partner - the one waiting in mind of the one wanting the divorce - that woman will never be all that he's painted her to be in his fantasy. If she were, she would have nothing to do with him.

Then the fantasy works in the opposite direction for his present partner. He starts comparing his wife with the airbrushed dream girl in his mind. And he will build a negative case for his wife just as he'll build a dream world for his girl friend. Now he decides his wife is always a nag - never makes love to him - constantly takes away his freedom - never is any fun, etc. etc.

**J. Allen Peterson** writes of the specific sin of a man planning an affair on his wife. But the reasoning process works the same for both men and women once our hearts spin out of the orbit of God's life-keeping truth:

**"The Myth of Greener Grass" - "As a rule a partner at home is no match for one in a fantasy. Comparisons increase as the affair deepens. The spouse at home now does not communicate anymore, is not as affectionate, does not meet my needs, etc. The fantasy is used to rationalize - to help justify what he's already committed to do. The mind is no longer a truth finding instrument, but a flatterer of his ego - protecting him from anything he doesn't want to hear."**

- 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 Pringles . 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.

And sooner or later, the step is taken. The affair is committed. Or the papers are signed. And the very same vicious circle starts all over again in the next relationship. That's because the ***because the problem was in the heart all along.***

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 teaching 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 and re-married before coming to Jesus Christ as Savior.***

And I can't allow myself to ignore Jesus' blunt words in the texts I quoted earlier - **Mark 10:11-12** - **“And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, [12] and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”**

Clearly, there are mistakes made. There are marriages that, if Jesus' words mean anything at all, shouldn't have been entered into. ***And there's no way to change that now.*** It is one thing to agree that Jesus cautions the danger of a forbidden ***start*** to a relationship. It's another to say that this creates a **permanent condition of ongoing adultery - that a second marriage can never be a pure relationship. That is not the teaching of the Scriptures.**

And I have never felt more strongly about anything I have said from this pulpit than I do about what I want to say now. 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.

How much unrighteousness does it cleanse me from anyway? ***All*** unrighteousness. It misses ***nothing***. Old things are passed away. Everything is made new. Especially made new are the ***beginnings of things The root is made new***

- 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.

There are some very helpful words from the Apostle Paul that Christians need to understand - **1 Corinthians 7:10-16** - **“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband [11] (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. [12] To the rest I say (I, not the Lord)** [There are some situations in addition to the ones Jesus covered] **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] For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”**

There are situations - difficult tragic situations. You, as a Christian need to do all you can to make your marriage what God wants it to be. But it won't always happen. You can't always hold things together. In those situations, says Paul, God has called you to "**peace**" (15).

- 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 ***re-married*** than you're married. If you're in your third marriage ***you must be faithful in it and make it strong. The principle is grace must never used to justify repeating sinful actions.***

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.**"

Jesus didn't say, "You've had one husband and five adulterous relationships." This is absolutely striking. This is the same Jesus who cautioned against making an improper beginning in re-marriage, let alone a second, third, fourth, and even fifth marriage. And yet Jesus seems to recognize that these were all legitimate, recognizable marriages. These words of Jesus to this repeating marriage enterer are the same lips that said to leave one partner for another is to commit adultery.

Taken all together Jesus is saying don't leave the marriage you're in. Work with all your forgiving might to stay in your first marriage. This is God's plan. Take the warning of Jesus seriously. But no matter what, make your present marriage strong in the Lord. Never entertain any thought of divorce. Be faithful in your heart toward your spouse.

- 5) **CONCLUSION** - From last week, if you are **entering** marriage, marry only in the Lord. Do not marry an unbeliever. If you **are** already married or divorced and legally re-married, stay in your marriage. 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.

Guard your hearts, church! Guard your homes!