

**Intro:** There's an old joke that's been around for a long time about a man and a woman who had been married for 50 years. Someone asked them the secret of their marital bliss. The man said, "Well, the wife and I had an agreement when we first got married and that was that when she was bothered about something she would just tell me off and get it out of her system. If I was mad about something I would just take a walk." He said, "I suppose you can attribute our marital success to the fact that I have largely lived an outdoor life."

Bill Cosby wrote a book about fatherhood. One place in it he says that he had a friend who was a famous actor who had two daughters. This father told Cosby what he had learned as a father. He said when a girl hits 13, you can just watch her lose her mind. And he said luckily she gets it back, but during the time that it's misplaced you lose yours! (these stories taken from tape by D. Jeremiah, "Heart Medicine")

This morning we're going to hear what God has to say about the family. The family is under attack in our day. That's nothing new. We all know the very institution of the family is being challenged by special interests groups. But what may surprise you is that the world is not the only aggressor. A much more subtle enemy exists right within our very ranks. The family is under attack not only from without, but also within.

So it was in Malachi's day. The family was under attack in the 5th century B.C. The problem wasn't the world. The problem was the people of God themselves.

The people of God in Malachi's day were guilty of a great crime. They were giving God the leftovers from their lives. They practiced a watered-down, convenient type of religion. But God wasn't impressed. He rebuked them in chapter one.

In chapter two, God told His people what they needed to do if they were going to break out of this "leftover" mode. Their priorities needed to change. They needed to learn to value four priorities. The first two priorities, which we saw last week, apply directly to ministers. First, a minister must value the glory of God (1-3). And second, a minister must value the Word of God (4-9). In his Personal life (5), and in his pastoral life (6-7). He must speak the truth, live the truth, and lead others towards the truth.

In 2:10, the focus shifts. The spotlight moves from the priests to the people. The priests' priorities were out of whack--they failed to teach the Word. Guess where it showed up? In the lives of the people, namely, in the home. The final two priorities are for the people, and have to do with the family.

What do we need to do in light of the disintegration of the family in our day? Malachi tells us. We need to learn to value two very important relationships, two covenant relationships, related to the family.

---

\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

**Proposition: According to Malachi 2:10-16, there are two priorities (two covenant relationships) which God expects us to value.**

I. Value the People of God (10-12).

A. How do we devalue this covenant?

1. By taking advantage of fellow covenant members (10)
2. By mixed marriages (11)

B. What happens when we devalue this covenant? (12)

1. There are spiritual consequences.
2. There social consequences.

II. Value the Partner God gives you (13-16).

A. What does God think of marriage?

1. Your marriage is a covenant (14).
2. Your spouse is your companion (14).
3. Your marriage is to produce godly offspring (15).
4. God hates divorce (16).

B. What must we do?

1. Be on guard (15b, 16b).
2. Value what God values.

The key word in the text is the word "covenant" (two covenants mentioned--v 10 "the covenant of our fathers," and v 14, "the wife of thy covenant"). A covenant is an arrangement between two parties involving mutual obligations (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 530). A covenant is a binding agreement, a promise, a commitment between two people. If the family is to be restored in our day, we in the church need to get a handle on the issue of "covenant." It will have a practical effect on two priorities.

### **I. Value the People of God (10-12).**

Malachi ministered 4 centuries before Christ. He was a prophet to the people of God in Judah. He asked them three rhetorical questions in v 10, "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously, every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai, and entered into a covenant relationship with them (the Mosaic covenant). He gave them His Law to show them how they were to live as His covenant people.

Today, we live under a covenant as well. We are not Israel, but the Church, and we live under the New covenant. Yet one thing is true in both covenants. We are not only in a covenant relationship with God, but also with each other.

#### A. How do we devalue this covenant?

Notice how Malachi's people did. V 10 uses the words, "deal treacherously every man against his brother." The NIV puts it this way, "Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by **BREAKING FAITH** with one another." The Hebrew word (bagad) means "to act unfaithfully with respect to a prior agreement or covenant." That's just what the Jews had done to each other (the word is mentioned in vv 10, 11, 14, 15, 16). They committed covenant violations against each other.

How had the Jews devalued their covenant with each other? In two ways.

### *1. By taking advantage of fellow covenant members (10)*

V 10 says the people dealt treacherously, every man against his brother. One of the great themes of the prophets is social injustice. God abhors it when His people take advantage of each other (see Amos 2:6-7). To hurt one is to hurt the whole community.

In the world, unregenerate people take advantage of others all the time. This week I received an advertisement from a man trying to sell me his tape series. His letter began, "Friend, Listen! This is today's 'real world' as reported on Page 1 of The Wall Street Journal: 'I want my people to destroy our competitors. I want to kill and crush them,' barks the chief of BankAmerica's far-flung branch network. A little more than two years ago, BankAmerica's survival was in doubt. Now net income is up 114%. This may be the only guy in the country who wouldn't benefit from my POWER NEGOTIATING techniques because he is already using them."

The world operates by a dog-eat-dog mentality. But God has a higher standard for His covenant people. We are not to "use" each other. We're not to rip our brothers off in business deals. We're not to take a fellow Christian to court (I Cor 6). In fact, if we do, we are violating the God's covenant.

In fact, if I violate my brother in a business deal on Friday, what does God think of my worship on Sunday? Take a look at v 12, "The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this...and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts."

There was a very specific way in which the Jews were devaluing each other.

### *2. By mixed marriages (11)*

V 11 "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel. Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD." Stop there. That's a serious indictment! Malachi says to his people, "You have profaned the holiness of the LORD!" God's holiness has to do with His "apartness and separateness." God designed Israel to reveal His holiness to the world by being holy themselves. But they cheapened His holiness. How? By engaging in mixed marriages.

Their crime surfaces in v 11, "And hath married the daughter of a foreign god." The word "married" is the root of the Hebrew noun "baal" (which means "lord, master, husband"; Baal was a Canaanite god). In Num 25:3, it says, "And Israel JOINED himself to Baal-peor; and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." For hundreds of years, the Israelites were enticed by the surrounding pagan gods. And often, they yielded and committed spiritual adultery.

One way it happened was by mixed marriages. What's that? Malachi's not talking about marriages between different races. He has in mind the same problem that Nehemiah faced. Jewish men, men who belonged to God's covenant people, were marrying women who did not belong to God's covenant people. They were "daughters of foreign gods."

I want to make a rather blunt observation. As parents, we all want our children to date/marry the "right" person. But I am amazed, as I watch, at the kind of input I see parents giving their children in such an important area. Some parents (even Christian) say, "Well, it's not my place to get involved in that decision (but they'll get involved in other major decisions, like what kind of car to buy)." Other parents make a

big deal about the educational or economic background of the potential mate, but seem to care little about their spiritual condition.

God's Word couldn't be clearer. He forbids His people to "intermarry" with non-believers. It's a violation of the covenant. In II Cor 6:14-15, God says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?...Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" I will not perform a marriage ceremony for a Christian who wants to marry a non-Christian for this reason. Such an act devalues the covenant purity of the people of God.

#### B. What happens when we devalue this covenant? (12)

We find out in v 12. Consequences show up in two areas.

##### *1. There are spiritual consequences.*

Do you realize what God said the penalty was to be for the sin of intermarriage? Excommunication. V 12 "The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this." For a believer to choose to marry a non-believer is a serious threat to the covenant which affects, not only the person, but the rest of the people of God.

##### *2. There social consequences.*

The LB captures the sober note of v 12, "May the Lord cut off from His covenant every last man, whether priest or layman, who has done this thing!" Under the new covenant, Paul said a person who violates his obligations was to be disciplined. We read in II Thes 3:14, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Social consequences.

What does Malachi have to say to us? Our covenant relationships matter to God, and they should matter to us. We need to value the people of God.

## **II. Value the Partner God gives you (13-16).**

The scene of v 13 is the altar in the temple. V 13 "And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears..." Do you know what was happening? The Jews were bringing their offerings to the altar. But God seemed distant and disinterested. "God, why aren't You helping me? Look, I've brought this sacrifice. Don't You care?"

Malachi said the people got so emotional they "flooded" God's altar with their tears. Didn't God hear them? Sure He did. Why didn't He answer? Because they had blatant sin in their lives (note: Emotion in worship is no substitute for confession of sin).

What was their sin? V 14 "Because the Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thine youth against whom thou has dealt treacherously." The problem in Malachi's day was that the people had a cheap view of marriage, and a flippant view of divorce. They were violating the marriage covenant.

Isn't it ironic that men were leaving their wives and crying before the altar at the same time? Isn't it strange that they were in blatant violation of God's command, yet still going through their religious motions? Not really. We have the same tendency.

It's called selective obedience. It's related to selective teaching. In v 9 the priests were selective in what they taught. In v 13, the people were selective in what they obeyed. They obeyed just enough of God's commands to be dangerous.

Malachi answers two questions for us relating to marriage.

#### A. What does God think of marriage?

You may be thinking, "I'm not married, so why does it matter?" One of the main reasons it matters is because even if you are not married, you talk with people who are. You may even talk with people who are married and contemplating throwing in the towel. Are you prepared to help them see what God thinks about their marriage, or will you merely give them your opinions? May God help us all, whether married or not, to know what God thinks about marriage. He tells us 4 truths in vv 13-16.

##### *1. Your marriage is a covenant (14).*

Malachi rebukes the men in v 14 for leaving their wives. Notice he calls marriage a "covenant". Marriage is not a social convenience. It's a binding covenant. It's a contract with obligations. Who is the witness to this contract? The Lord (14).

You say, "Well if I'm not happy in my marriage, I should get out of it, right?" According to Ophra and Phil, maybe, but not according to God. He calls it a covenant.

##### *2. Your spouse is your companion (14).*

If you read between the lines, this seems to be the scenario. In Malachi's day, guess what the middle-age men were doing? They were trading in their wives and running after younger women (v 14 speaks of "the wife of thy youth"). So Malachi confronts them, "How can you do that? Your wife is not like an old coat that you can hang onto until you're tired of it, and get a new one. Your wife is your companion. She is your partner."

The word "companion" means "joined together, united." It implies harmony and sharing. Malachi elaborates in v 15, "And did not he make one..." Listen. If I am one with my spouse, that means I don't abandon her when the tough times come, or when I come to the conclusion she doesn't "make me happy" anymore. She is my companion.

##### *3. Your marriage is to produce godly offspring (15).*

God has a special purpose for marriage, revealed in v 15, "That He might seek a godly seed (offspring)." The Israelites' sins were flying in the face of that purpose. They were divorcing their wives, and remarrying pagan women. How are you going to produce a godly offspring when you do that?

One commentator wrote (Baldwin, 240-1), "Only when both parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can the children be given the security which provides the basis for godly living. The family was intended to be the school in which God's way of life was practiced and learned."

Is your family a school of godliness? Are your children learning how to live for God in your home? (Caution: Some people say, "We don't want children. They'll get in the way of our career." God didn't endorse your marriage to enhance your career. He did design marriage to produce a godly offspring)

##### *4. God hates divorce (16).*

V 16 reads, "For the Lord, the God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away." The Hebrew word is strong (different from 1:3) and means "to detest." In God's opinion, divorce is a terrible thing. You may say, "You shouldn't say such harsh words. There are innocent people who have been the victims of divorce." First, I didn't say it. God did. And second, I remind you that there were "innocent" victims in Malachi's day too, those middle-women who were abandoned by their husbands. That's why God hates divorce. Divorce hurts His people. Divorce violates His covenant.

Jesus reiterated this truth in Mt 19:6, "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." You say, "Wait a minute. Didn't Moses say divorce was permitted?" That's the very question the Pharisees raised (7). Remember how Jesus responded (Mt 19:8), "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

At the end of v 16, Malachi compares divorce to violence, "One man covers violence with his garment." The Bible Knowledge Commentary observes, "A man's covering himself...with his garment symbolizes marriage (cf. Ruth 3:9; Ezek. 16:8). But covering himself with violence describes violating the marriage relationship, which is what divorce does." To God, divorce is like a garment of violence, a gross injustice.

B. What must we do? Two responses...

1. *Be on guard (15b, 16b).*

Twice the charge is given, "Take heed to your spirit." "Guard yourself in your spirit (NIV)." The LB says, "Guard your passions." Take to heart what God has said.

2. *Value what God values.*

Choose today to value the people of God, and the partner God gives you.

**Conclusion:**

At 7 P.M. on October 20, 1968, a few thousand spectators remained in the Mexico City Olympic Stadium. It was cool and dark. The last of the marathon runners, each exhausted, were being carried off to first-aid stations. The winner, Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia had finished the 26 mile race more than an hour earlier.

As the remaining spectators prepared to leave, suddenly the sound of sirens and police whistles was heard. All eyes turned to the gate. A lone figure wearing the colors of Tanzania entered the stadium. His name was John Stephen Akhwari. He was the last man to finish the marathon. His leg was bloodied and bandaged, having been severely injured in a fall. He grimaced with each step as he hobbled around the 400-meter track. The spectators rose and applauded him as if he were the winner. After crossing the finish line, Akhwari slowly walked off the field without turning to the cheering crowd. In view of his injury and having no chance of winning a medal, someone asked him why he had not quit. He replied, "My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it." (story from Leadership Journal, Spring, 49)

May God help us to have the same devotion, the same commitment to Him and to the covenants we have made--to the people of God, and to the partner He gives us.