

Malachi's Appeal To Backsliders (Part Two)

Malachi 2:10 to 2:16

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Today, I am going to continue to go through the book of Malachi and direct your attention to principles we can apply to our lives today.

God's appeal through Malachi's message is designed to break through the barrier of Israel's disbelief, disappointment, and discouragement. The promised time of prosperity had not yet come and the prevailing attitude and excuse that it is not worth serving God because He does not really care about us, becomes evident in the Israelites' moral and religious corruption.

However, God reveals His continuing love in spite of Israel's lethargy. His appeal in this warning is for the people and priests to stop and realize that their lack of blessing is not caused by God's lack of concern, but rather by their disobedience of the covenant law.

When they repent and return to God with sincere hearts, the obstacles to the flow of divine blessing will be removed. Malachi also reminds the people that a day of reckoning will surely come when God will judge the righteous and the wicked. So we can see parallels to this being a warning to us today.

Having dealt with the sins of the priests, Malachi now, in Malachi 2, turns to the nation as a whole, the priests and the leaders and the common people.

Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

I want to focus on the word "father" here. The biblical term fatherhood, as it describes God's relationship to other beings, is used primarily in three ways. We are going to go through a series of scriptures to show this fatherhood relationship just to give us an idea of where this scripture is coming from.

First, the fatherhood of God applies in a general sense to everyone. Since all men and women are created by God in His image, thus their creaturehood is derived from His Fatherhood. This fact is demonstrated in Hebrews 12:9, which speaks of God as "the Father of spirits," and in Numbers 16:22, which speaks of God as "the God of the spirits of all flesh."

When a person dies, the human spirit returns to its source, "the Father of spirits," "the God of the spirits of all flesh." In this way, God keeps a record of each person's existence before their death.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then the dust [that is the human body] will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Then in Acts 17, Luke records that Paul even agrees with a heathen poet, stating that:

Acts 17:28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."

He does not mean that everyone will have eternal life, but rather that all men and women are the offspring of God in their created natures. In James 3, James says:

James 3:9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

God is also the Father of all as sustainer of life. Every person is an object of His fatherly care.

Matthew 18:10 “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

This indicates that each person has more than one angel assigned to him, as long as he does not reject God. Furthermore, God is not willing that any should perish.

Matthew 18:14 “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

I Timothy 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Even when men and women reject God, He still provides for them, as He does believers, with the necessities of life.

Matthew 5:45 “That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Acts 14:17 “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

So God is the God of all human beings, there is no doubt about that, and that is one of the ways in which His fatherhood is spoken of.

The second way the fatherhood of God is applied in a specific sense is to God, the Father of Christ. Even a new Christian eventually wonders in what sense God may be called the Father of Christ and Christ the Son of God? Now this question has a four-part answer.

First, it is important to understand that the title “Son of God” does not speak of physical nature because God is Spirit. As you know, the earliest revelation of who and what God is, is found in the New Testament in John 1.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

“The Word” in this passage is translated from the Greek *logos*, which means spokesman, word, or revelatory thought. It is the name there used for an individual personage. Verse 14 explains who or what this *Logos*, this “Word” is.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

When He was born as Jesus Christ, he was flesh and blood; physical and could be seen, touched and felt. But what was He as God; as the *Logos*; as the spokesman? Verse 24 of John 4 gives the answer.

John 4:24 “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

So the “Word” then is a personage, made of flesh, begotten of God, who through this latter begetting, became His Father. Yet at that prehistoric time in John 1, the “Word” has not yet become the Son of God. He divested Himself of His glory, as a Spirit divinity, to be begotten as a human or sired by God and born of Mary.

So here we find revealed, originally two personages. One is God, and the other, with God in that prehistoric time, was another personage who was also God; one who later was begotten and born as Jesus Christ. But these two personages were spirit, which is invisible to human eyes unless spiritually manifested. Yet at the time described in verse 1, Jesus was not the Son of God and God was not His Father.

Centuries before the Word was physically born as the Son of God, Abraham knew Him as Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:1-3 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,” without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

So this Melchizedek was the High Priest of the Most High God. This Melchizedek had existed from eternity; fatherless, motherless, descent-less; having no beginning, nor end, but made like the Son of God. Christ was without father, without mother, without descent, in Abraham’s time, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.

Since Melchizedek was “like the Son of God,” and abides as High Priest forever continually, and Jesus Christ is now High Priest, Melchizedek and Jesus Christ is one and the same person. So God also had existed eternally with the “Word.”

Now Jesus, when He was the “Word,” was an immortal being who had existed always. There never was a time when He did not exist. He was, then, *like* the Son of God, but He was not yet the Son of God. He also was God, along with God.

John 1 and Hebrews 7 show that the Word, in the beginning, before anything had been created, was with God, and He, also, was God. There is a simple analogy of how this can be.

A man named Robert might be with a man named Jones, and Robert might also be Jones because Robert is the son of Jones, and Jones is the family name. Yet they are two separate persons. This is a physical analogy, in a sense, of what the relationship between God the Father and Christ is like.

The only point of difference in that analogy is that the Word, at the time of John 1:1, was not yet the Son of God. But He was with God, and He also was God. They were not yet Father and Son, but they were the God Kingdom with the “God” Family name, with, in a sense, the last name God (for our purposes here today).

That family is now composed of God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son, and many born from above saints who are now already, born from above, sons of God.

Romans 8:14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

In combination with this, we will read I John 3:2 which says:

I John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Now secondly, the title “Son of God” expresses a unique relationship. Christ distinguished His Son from that of His disciples.

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”

He is the only begotten of God in a sense that no one else is. Again, John 1:14 says:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And we all know this verse:

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

So we see there that Christ has a unique relationship with God the Father and we too have a unique relationship, yet it is different than what Jesus Christ does, although it is somewhat similar.

Third, the title “Son of God” describes a relationship of equality. The Son of God is not less than God in His divine nature. When Jesus claimed to be one with the Father, He was speaking of a unity of substance with the Father and thus equality in all the attributes of deity.

John 10:30 “I and My Father are one.”

The Jews certainly understood this claim, because they took up stones to stone him, protesting that “You make yourself God.” We will pick it up here in verses 33-38.

John 10:33-38 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."

We see there that there is a relationship of equality there that Christ shows Himself.

Fourth is that the title "Son of God" especially emphasizes Christ's role as the revealer of God. He alone possesses the knowledge of the Father, other than what He has revealed to us. Now turn to John 14.

John 14:6-11 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

So Christ is the sole mediator of that knowledge and we find that in I Timothy 2.

I Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

Therefore, no one can know the Father except through the Son. The narrowness of this way to God, and the uniqueness of our call and election, should be a sober incentive to want to share this knowledge with others. This is what we do as we discuss scriptures among our families and with coworkers, and through the power of the Internet. We are passing on that knowledge, as we well should.

Going back to the term "fatherhood," the third way that it is used is in describing God's relationship to other beings by applying it in a specific sense to God, the Father of believers. God is the Father of all who believe in Christ, and in a special sense not shared by unbelievers.

God is called their Father, first of all, because they have a new standing before Him, speaking of members of God's church. While unbelievers are the offspring of God because He created them, they do not have standing as sons. Their standing is rather as condemned sinners before God the Judge.

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

When a person believes in Christ as Savior, his life is wonderfully changed from grim condemnation to privileged sonship. This new standing grants to all believers the legal right and spiritual privileges of divine sonship. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit proves that we are children of God and heirs with Christ.

Now God is the Father of believers also in the sense that He gives them new life.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again [or born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

This relationship then is a family one of the same realities that exist between an earthly father and child: the birth of the child, partaking of the father's nature, the father's care for the child, and the father's discipline of the child. Furthermore, this new father/child relationship carries with it new brothers and sisters. So there is a direct physical parallel to the Family of God that we see in our own families.

To obtain God as Father is not a result of one's own merit, but rather a result of Christ's. The one who believes in Christ as Savior enters into the blessed Father/child relationship with God solely on the grounds of Christ's sonship. Hebrews 2:17 says:

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

So it is the grand privilege and calling to know God as Father as we do personally as members of God's church.

Now what is the cause of this problem of divorce? A problem that involves our national character and has untold evil effects on society. There are many causes, of course, depending on how the subject is treated, but like most problems the underlying causes are spiritual. And among these spiritual causes is the breakdown of faithfulness to God's teaching on the evils of divorce.

Malachi confronts the men who divorced their wives to marry pagan women, and here in Malachi 2, he says:

Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

In this section, God points out four main sins against faithfulness regarding their profaning the covenant, which are: treachery, hypocrisy, impurity, and hostility.

The first, is treachery. The original Hebrew word is used as a verbal noun to describe “the one who deals treacherously.” He is one who does not honor an agreement. The root means to deceive.

The verb is used to denote unfaithfulness in several different relationships. It is used in connection with unfaithfulness in marriage. Biblically, the object of the faithlessness may be the wife, wife of one's youth, or the husband. The word is also used to describe Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord.

In addition to the metaphor of unfaithfulness in marriage to describe Israel's revolt against the Lord, the Lord or His covenant is sometimes the explicit object of the treachery. Even to question His justice is an act of treachery.

Malachi 2:11 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 [Judah] has married the daughter of a foreign god.

"Treacherously" there could be stated as Judah has been unfaithful. Now jumping down to verse 14.

Malachi 2:14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

The men loving pagan women was not a new problem in Judah. When the Israelites left Egypt, there was a "mixed multitude" that left with them, which suggests that some Israelites may have married Egyptian spouses.

Israel sinned greatly when they mixed with the women of Midian at Baal Peor, and God judged them severely. Ezra and Nehemiah had to contend with this problem, and it is not totally absent from the church today. As we will see, this was a spiritual sin in going after false religious beliefs which manifest itself as adultery in their marriages. We will read II Corinthians 6 here.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." [Now this has to do with spiritual purity, which we will see shortly.] "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

In divorcing their Israelite wives and marrying pagan women, the men of Malachi's time were committing several sins. To begin with, it was treachery as they broke their vows to God and to their wives and they were profaning God's covenant and treating it as nothing.

Not only had the Lord given specific requirements for marriage in His law, but the covenant of marriage was built in the creation. Malachi wrote, "Have we not all one father?" This refers to God as the Father of all humans, the Creator.

God made man and women for each other and established marriage for the good of the human family. So, what these men did was contrary to what God had written into nature and in His covenant right from the beginning.

The next thing against faithfulness which profanes the covenant is hypocrisy. After committing these sins, the men then brought offerings to the Lord and wept at the altar, seeking His help and blessing. Maybe they had the idea that they could sin blatantly with the intention of coming to God for forgiveness.

But if the men that Malachi was writing to were truly repentant they would have forsaken their heathen wives and taken their true wives back, which is what Ezra made them do in Ezra 9-10.

Now these men were guilty of hypocritical worship that had nothing to do with a changed heart. Instead of forgiving them, God was ready to “cut them off.”

Malachi 2:12-13 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this [that is treacherously profane God's holy institution], being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

In matters of ethics and morals, there are many things in society that are legal but are not biblical. Brides and grooms must remember that God is an unseen witness at every wedding.

Malachi 2:14 Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

God also witnesses those who commit sexual immorality, and He witnesses those who live together who are unmarried.

One day there will come a terrible harvest from the seeds being planted today by those who despise God's laws and the principles He has built into nature. God's judgment will be carried out at that time.

Purity versus impurity is the next issue. Impurity is against faithfulness and profanes the covenant. Purity is the means by which God's holiness is established and protected. From that principle and purpose, purity eventually became a way of speaking about moral conduct. The distinction between pure and impure is made by God and maintained according to His instructions.

Associated with God's holiness, purity is intimately related to divine election. Throughout the Old Testament there is the theme of becoming unclean and being cut off from the people of God, from divine presence and from divine blessing. Purity is *achieved* by effort and attention, and *maintained* by effort and attention. In the New Testament, purity is more thoroughly explained.

When the Pharisees challenged Jesus' casual attitude toward ritual washing of hands, Jesus articulates the principle in Mark 7 that:

Mark 7:18-20 So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.”

Ephesians 5:5 is of similar spiritual importance in which it states that, “no impure person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Malachi commended the faithful husbands who obeyed the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Unlike the men who took pagan wives just to satisfy their sexual hunger, these faithful men wanted to father children who would be a godly seed, devoted Israelites, and not idol worshipers.

Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. [This is why God made man and woman one person; one family.] Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

The biblical standard for marriage derives from the creation account, which establishes the conventional nature of marriage.

Jesus, when discussing a question about divorce, began with creation. Malachi starts from this creational base. He refers to creation, calls marriage a covenant, refers to the oneness or union of Genesis 2:24, and reminds the community of the purpose of marriage, which is, godly offspring.

The basic issue in verse 15 is not race, because humans are humans whether they are Jews or Midianites or whatever they may be. The basic issue was loyalty to the God of Israel and the maintaining of a godly home.

God called Israel to be the channel for bringing the Messiah into the world, and anything that corrupted that stream would work against His great plan of salvation.

God commanded the Israelites 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. Anything that broke down that wall of separation would play into the hands of the evil one who did all he could to keep the Messiah from being born.

The fourth thing against faithfulness that profanes the covenant is hostility. In Malachi 2:16, God gives the reason for His abhorrence of divorce because of the violence involved. Then, He gives a warning to be careful not to be deceitful and to control your attitude.

Malachi 2:16 “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” Says the Lord of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Many translations render verse 16 in that way. In those translations, “I hate divorce!” is about as clear a statement as God can make. However, the *English Standard Version* translates verse 16 slightly differently.

Malachi 2:16 (ESV) “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her,” 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.”

Both of these are similar and I believe that both are correct statements. They both show that the married couple have hate involved in the situation. The ESV suggests that hate, in at least one of the spouses, commonly precedes divorce, followed by an inherent violent consequence. Although God hates divorce, nevertheless, He conditionally allows it because of man’s weaknesses.

Those who want to please God certainly would not want to do anything that God abhors, but would do everything possible to heal the marriage. God gave Adam one wife, not many, and He declared that the two were one flesh. Divorce pulls apart that which God put together, and Jesus warned us not to do that here in Matthew 19.

Matthew 19:3-7 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ [so Christ’s answer goes back to creation] and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

The reason for the hostility is found in verse 8.

Matthew 19:8-9 He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

This should not be understood to mean that only hard-hearted people would ever initiate a divorce. Rather, it means that because there was hard-hearted rebellion against God, it led to serious defilement of marriages. Hostility always relates to enmity against God.

The presence of sin in the community meant that some marriages would be seriously defiled and irretrievably damaged, and God therefore provided divorce as a solution in those cases.

In verse 7, the Pharisees had asked why Moses commanded divorce, but Jesus corrects them, showing that divorce is not what God intended from the beginning, and that even when it is allowed, it is permitted only on very specific grounds, but never required. God’s original intent was that marriage would be lifelong.

Why does Malachi mention a “garment” and “violence”? How does divorce “cover one’s garment”? Covering something hides it. In the case of divorce, something is hidden deceitfully. God is intensely against one or both of the spouses hiding something or breaking faith with the other impacting the marriage because they are under a marriage covenant; a marriage contract.

The violence mentioned in Malachi 2:16 is not necessarily physical abuse. It is any physical, verbal, or attitudinal mistreatment that hurts one another in marriage. It is any detrimental treatment of one’s spouse.

Committing adultery may not involve hitting, nasty put downs, or rolling the eyes and scowling at one’s spouse, but nevertheless, violence has still been committed against the marriage because, at the very least, it abuses its privileges.

There is more than violence that breaks the marriage covenant. Nevertheless, violence involves one spouse or both not being committed to his or her responsibilities to the marriage. In reality, this violence pushes people to divorce.

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. Ruth asked Boaz to take her under his wing. God did the same thing when establishing His marriage covenant with ancient Israel.

Ezekiel 16:8 “When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 16:10 I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

If a man divorces his wife, instead of having a garment that symbolizes love, he had a garment that symbolizes violence. He wrenched apart that which God said is one. By his infidelity, he made the marriage bed a place of violence. Divorce is like an act of violence in an area where there should be tenderness.

The main lessons of this passage are clear. In marriage, a man and a woman become one flesh; and for members of the body of Christ, God is personally active in that union, covering us with His righteousness. Through marriage, God is seeking a godly seed that will carry on His work on earth by representing His way of life.

Marriage is a physical union of “one flesh” and can be discontinued or broken by specific physical causes such as: death, sexual sin, or desertion. A spiritual marriage union can be broken by spiritual causes, as God’s covenant with Israel was broken. Here are three scriptures regarding these causes. These are just a few examples, it is not to be thorough coverage of divorce and remarriage, it is just an overview.

So regarding death:

Romans 7:1-3 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Regarding sexual sin:

Matthew 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

Regarding desertion:

I Corinthians 7:12-14 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

So the sanctified wife sanctifies the unbelieving husband and children as well, meaning that they are set apart for a special purpose.

I Corinthians 7:15-16 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

God's original intent is that one man and one woman be devoted to each other in marriage for one lifetime. Divorce for reasons other than those given in Scripture, even though secularly legal, would grieve the heart of God and be wrong biblically.

Now in Malachi's day there were many divorces and many mixed marriages of God's people with unbelievers, which is a matter related to divorce. Worse yet, the problem even existed among the priests, who should have resisted the breakups of godly homes in Israel, but rather they encouraged them instead.

Malachi words his condemnation of mixed marriages and divorce broadly to include laypeople as well as priests. But he has just been talking about the sins of the priests, and we are no doubt to assume that this, though also a sin of the people, was among their faults as well.

Malachi was writing contemporaneously with Nehemiah's second residence in Jerusalem, at which time Nehemiah rebuked the marital infidelity of the priests.

In Nehemiah 13 there is a clear example of a mixed marriage, involving the grandson of the high priest himself.

Nehemiah 13:28-29 And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

This is the very language used and the charge leveled by Malachi and they were contemporary prophets. So the same thing was going on in Israel.

The point is that the priests' permissive attitude toward divorce and their own bad examples contributed greatly to the loose moral climate of Malachi's day. Sadly many ministers are doing the same thing today, they are part of the problem.

In observing marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the greater churches of God today, in all but a very few cases, the overall tendency of some churches is to lower the standards and propose that the world's contemporary low practices are not so bad after all.

In the case of a person who was married and divorced and then, subsequent to the divorce, became a Christian, it is right for him or her to marry again for the first time as a Christian to a true believer. II Corinthians 5:17 tells us, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Now sadly, these few and carefully qualified exceptions have been used to excuse almost anything. They have been used to open the door to remarriages, that in many cases must be judged offensive to God on the basis of the related biblical passages. Christian ministers must be careful not to be part of the breakdown in the marriage. Ministers have to be very careful in dealing with such things.

Mixed marriage, that is a marriage of a believer to an unbeliever, is a violation of God's righteous standard for a godly marriage. It is never God's will that a believer marry an unbeliever, either in a first marriage, which is one obvious sin and error, or in a second marriage, which seems to have been a frequent fault in Israel.

The men had been divorcing their Jewish wives for the daughters of the Gentiles. The excuse that is given is this: "But surely an unbelieving spouse can be saved by the consistent testimony of a believing wife or husband. Paul says so."

Granted, that is true, but notice that Paul's words are given as encouragement to one who was married as an unbeliever and then became a believer. Such a person might wonder whether he or she should automatically divorce the unbelieving wife or husband, and Paul's answer is no.

God does not want divorce. God has called the believing spouse to faith and He will most likely work in the unbelieving spouse's life too. It is no promise that the unbelieving spouse will necessarily be called, but it is an encouragement along those lines. It is not at all an authorization for a believer to marry a non-Christian.

God is gracious and we must acknowledge that sometimes when a Christian marries one who is not a Christian, God graciously draws the non-Christian to Christ. We praise God when that happens, but it is not the usual outcome. More often than not mixed marriage brings great sorrow and pain to the Christian.

If you willfully disobey God and marry a non-Christian, do not deceive yourself with the belief that you will be the cause of your husband's or wife's conversion. By the grace of God that may *possibly* happen. But it usually does not. Mixed marriages usually end in great unhappiness or divorce. It is God who calls a person into His church!

Divorce is a matter of a man and a woman breaking faith with his or her spouse. God, who is a God of faithfulness and truth, hates infidelity. The marriage vow speaks of union "in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health."

We cannot guarantee anyone happiness, not even ourselves. We cannot guarantee affluence or health, either. But we can guarantee to our spouse we will stick by our word, that we will not break faith just because fidelity is difficult or because another way or person becomes enticing and seemingly more attractive.

God hates divorce because it is disloyal, because it violates His righteous standard. However He does allow it under certain circumstances.

Divorcing persons generally do not want to admit this, and their reluctance is understandable. They have to raise their children, and it is difficult to do this if they are laboring under guilt that the

divorce has done the children great harm. But admit it or not, divorce does harm children. Many children of divorced parents get on with life somehow, but all are harmed, and some are harmed deeply and irreparably.

We live in a day of human rights. Everyone is fighting for his or her rights, or so it seems. Even divorcing persons fight for their supposed right to be happy. So what about the children? They also have rights, a right to a mother and a father; a right to a stable home environment; a right to an actualized biblical model of what a God-blessed home should be. Divorce deprives them of that and often leads them into a self-destructive life pattern.

The great majority of children appearing in juvenile court are from broken homes. The vast majority of prison inmates have the same background. But do not despair, for a parent who has a faithful relationship with God, Scripture says:

Psalm 68:5 A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.

Psalm 10:14 But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless.

So where there is a lack, where there is one converted parent in the family, God is there to help pick up the slack, so to speak, and to make sure lessons are learned and that character development is taken care of as He feels needed to be complete.

Now this brings us to the first point that Malachi makes. The basis of all he says is that God has created marriage; that it is His idea; marriage is of God.

It was God, not man, who made the human race male and female, and marriage between a man and a woman only! It was God who looked at the man in his singleness and judged, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper comparable to him." It was God who brought the first woman to the first man and, in a sense, performed the first marriage ceremony. It was God who said, "Be fruitful and increase in number."

It is to this original creation of man and woman and of God uniting them in one permanent marriage that Malachi refers: "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one?" In other words, why did God not make more than one wife for Adam or more than one husband for Eve?

Because He was seeking godly offspring. This shows that godliness is linked to marriage faithfulness.

So "guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth" as God commands in Malachi 2:15. Marriage is not only a divine institution. It is the first of all institutions and is therefore the basis of the institutions that follow it. Destroy marriage, as the world is trying to do today, and all other institutions will fall with it.

Because marriage comes from God above and not from man below, it involves moral, not merely physical, problems. A sin against the commandment of purity is a sin against God, not simply the offending of propriety, the foolishness of youth, and the evidence of indecency.

Jesus Christ tells us that, when God's children are joined in wedlock, they are united by God, and beneath the evident strength and courage and love that this divine direction promises, there is a penetrating, ominous warning.

Sodom and Gomorrah were burned out of existence because of the vile disregard of the holiness of marriage. David's rule over Israel was blackened by his marital foolishness and by the royal lust he forgot God and dedicated himself to raging passion.

Divorce is a physical manifestation of a spiritual problem. How does Malachi 2:16 relate to our spiritual participation in the church?

In Malachi's time the ministry is being condemned for departing from God and His truth and lusting after false doctrines. This connection shows that Malachi is discussing the marriage of the church and Christ, just as the apostle Paul did in Ephesians 5:21-33. We will read it to see the principle of the Christ/church marriage here.

Ephesians 5:29-33 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Christ has made a marriage covenant with us to produce the godly seed of God, the offspring of this union, for His Kingdom. But treachery is being committed against Christ's wife, the church of our youth, and, it is putting God's children in danger. Traitors against God are deceiving people into false doctrine.

God, through Malachi, is indicating that those preachers and teachers today who forsake the covenant and pursue the traditions of men and teach false doctrine will receive judgment for it. If one is hiding treachery that he is perpetrating against Christ's bride, it would be better to divorce.

Christ uses the authority of His words in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 to say something like this: "If you false ministers hate My wife, the people who truly obey My commandments, give her a certificate of divorce. Let her pursue Me, her first husband. Then she will be free of false doctrine."

When understood in this context of the whole of Scripture and biblical principles found therein, Christ is not saying in Malachi 2:16 that He hates divorce in every case. He is saying, "release My wife from these harlotries so that she can return to Me, with whom she made the covenant."

Under these principles and under these conditions, God endorses divorce when it is causing spiritual harm. After extensive pleading, mercy, and patience, God divorced Israel for their continued adultery. Jesus Christ does not encourage divorce, but He does allow for it when it comes to a person's spiritual health, salvation, and eternal life.

In the final analysis, however, the fundamental reason why God hates divorce is that God created marriage to illustrate the most blessed of all spiritual relationships, the union of a converted man and woman with Christ; the divine bridegroom of the church. Divorce must therefore illustrate apostasy or the falling away of a man or woman from God.

It takes two converted faithful people, a husband and a wife, to make a marriage work well as God intends it to work. So may God help us have a faithful relationship with Him and to our spouses.