

"God Hates Divorce" Malachi 2:10 - 3:7

Introduction

When I am involved in marriage counseling, I often tell couples that there are three options in marriage.

#1 You can have a good marriage. It takes lots of work. It involves great amounts of humility; a forgiving spirit; a willingness to invest time, energy and effort; and a commitment to communicate and work through deep waters. (One of the fallacies believed by couples who are having trouble is that people with good marriages haven't faced deep hurt, pain and disappointment in their marriage.)

#2 You can have lousy marriage and grit your teeth and bare it. There are lots of couples who stay together for the sake of the kids, the sake of their reputations, or the sake of commitments they made. Lousy marriages stay lousy because one or both parties are unwilling to make their marriage a good marriage. This is not a very satisfying life, nor is it one that pleases God. In marriages like this you have couples living separate lives under the same roof.

#3 You can have a lousy marriage and decide to get out of the marriage by divorce. Again, when the pain gets too great and one or both parties are unwilling to take the necessary steps to rebuild the marriage, too often the seemingly easy escape of divorce is the choice of preference. But, as we

will see today, God hates divorce. And with only a couple of exceptions it's not a legitimate biblical option.

So really the only good choice is the decision to have a good marriage. Good marriages are built upon the foundation of companionship and commitment. And that's what we are going to see today. Divorce is the world's way of avoiding the hard work of building and rebuilding a union that is in trouble.

Today we continue our series *Things God Hates*. We've already studied Proverbs 6:16-19 where we have the most comprehensive list of things our Lord hates. But before we leave this series there are a couple of more that we want to consider. This morning we turn to the prophecy of Malachi to consider the fact that God hates divorce.

[Malachi 2:10-3:7]

Malachi not only holds the spot as the last book in the Old Testament list, it is also written as one of the last prophetic words of God before 400 years of silence and the beginning of the New Testament. Malachi was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, addressing many of the same issues and concerns of those men because he was dealing with the same people and the same problems.

The people of God had lost much of their hope and joy. Life was not the paradise they expected after the captivity in Babylon. They had been expecting a grand resurgence of national prominence. They longed for a glorious earthly kingdom. They anticipated the arrival of their earthly deliverer and Messiah. Instead they struggled with poverty, injustice, a smaller, less glorious temple –

and no Messiah. They became discouraged and began to marginalize their faith.

In the prophecy of Malachi there is a sharp contrast between the sins of the people and the promise of grace and forgiveness and renewal in the coming Messiah. Malachi deals with all kinds of practical issues. Marriage and divorce is just one of them. He also addresses worship, spiritual leadership, broken promises, oppression, tithing and judgment.

But those issues were merely symptoms of much deeper problems. At the heart of it was the fact that many of the people had lost their respect for God and had ceased to honor Him. Look back at 1:6 (read). The attitude of that day was very much like today. People were a lot more interested in what pleased themselves than what pleased God. Despising the name of God is essentially disregarding the glory of His name. The consequences were devastating.

1. Their worship was not sincere and pure. It was self serving and self pleasing.
2. Blessings had been removed from them. What should have been blessing was a curse. Look at 2:2-3.
3. They were sad. Joy was gone. Instead of Psalm 122:1 (I was glad to hear them saying to the Lord's house let us go) we read 2:13.

You see, if your relationship with God is gone or poor, other problems begin to appear. And the wisdom to solve those problems is compromised. This whole book shows the questioning, doubting spirit that had taken over in the church. Back and forth things went. God lays a charge – *you've done this*. The people respond – *how have we done that?*

So that's the background for the trouble in the family. There was first trouble in the spiritual life of the people of God.

Now let's look more specifically at the particular problem in the family. There were essentially two reasons the family was in trouble. First, they were marrying outside of the faith. You'll see it there at the end of verse 11. *Judah has married the daughter of a foreign god.* Being what the Bible calls *unequally yoked* is not exclusively a New Testament idea – although II Corinthians 6:14 says clearly *do not be bound together with unbelievers.* God doesn't want Christians to marry non Christians because they will find themselves unable to share the most precious thing in their life – their love for Christ. And they will constantly face the temptation to compromise their faith.

For that reason, I urge you young people again not even consider any kind of romantic interest in someone unless they are deeply committed to Christ.

The believers in Malachi's day had done so and they were reaping the unhappy consequences of that decision.

The second reason the family was in trouble was because spouses had *dealt treacherously with one another.* He speaks specifically to the husband here, but in truth it can go either way.

The key verse in this passage is 2:14. *The Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*

What does it mean to deal treacherously with your spouse? You might imagine lots of things you could do that would fit into that category. If you talked to people with troubled marriages you know that there are many ways to get under the skin of

your spouse. There are a lot of ways to undermine things. We can be very creative. We know how to *push the right buttons*.

But Malachi identifies two things that will undermine a marriage more quickly than anything else. And it's interesting that he calls both of these things treachery. Treachery is basically a violation of allegiance or an act of treason.

1. Abandon the companionship of marriage. Remember one of the primary reasons God instituted marriage was because *He saw that it was not good for man to be alone*. At the heart of marriage is union – the coming together of heart, soul and body.

But that takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of work because we are all sinners and we do all kinds of things to hinder union. And so to have truly meaningful companionship couples have to spend time alone together. They have to do the hard work of communicating – not only facts and schedules, but dreams and feelings and thoughts. They have to have patience and a willingness to overlook much and forgive much. (7X70) Two don't become one flesh simply by a promise or a physical act. They become one flesh when they give themselves to one another on every level.

If that investment is not made, or it becomes lax in a marriage, things deteriorate. So I want to urge you to reinvest in your marriage. Whatever it takes, you've got to be willing to deepen your relationship with your spouse. Dates; turn the sports off; weekends away; daily talk; phone calls; interest in each others days.

The second thing that will undermine a marriage is:

2. A Lack of Commitment to the Covenant

You see, when you get married, it's not an act between two people. Marriage involves three. You, your spouse and God. Jesus said, *what **God** has joined together let no one tear apart*. The reason God hates divorce is:

1. Because it breaks a covenant promise made by two people to Him and to one another.
2. Because it tears apart what is one and that is always painful.

There are only two exceptions that God allows. And in both cases He allows it (not requires it) because the covenant is already broken. One is when one party is involved in adultery and has so grossly violated the marriage covenant that the marriage has become virtually non-existent. And two, when a non-Christian comes to the point that he or she is no longer able to tolerate living with their Christian partner and they just want to get away from him or her and Christ who lives in them.

But beyond those two things, God hates divorce. Verse 16 says that it's just wrong. So why do we do it? Why statistically is there as much divorce in the church as out of the church. Part of the answer is the power of human emotion and the issues deep in our spirit. Twice in this section God warns us to *take heed to our spirits*. You'll see that warning both in verses 15 and 16.

The hurt in human relationships can be so deep and so painful that we begin to turn things around. God points this out in verse 17 (read). Do you see what's happening here? Those wanting divorce have taken up one of two defenses for their action. Either they say, *What I'm doing is really a good thing and God approves of it*, or they blame God. *Where is the God of justice?*

But God has a different solution. And that's what chapter 3 is all about. Chapter 3 is about the

covenant or promise that our Father in heaven made with His Son. It was a commitment that involved several things that can all be imitated in marriage.

1. God is committed to loving the world.

Verse 1 (read). *For God so loved the world that He gave.* At the heart of covenant is love.

God's plan is that your marriage would reflect a perfect, self-sacrificing love - that you would be one heart, one mind, one flesh. It's a pretty tough standard, but God is committed to loving the world and covenant love sets its sights on that kind of love.

2. God is committed to rescuing the world.

Look at verse 6 & 7 (read). God's Covenant love was not erased when sin came. The Father in heaven and His Son had made a promise to one another to rescue the world. The Father sent the Son to pay the penalty for sin. And the Son agreed to come to earth, to live a perfect life and to die on the cross. For any who would by faith trust in Jesus Christ, They agreed to forgive them of their sin.

In your marriage relationship, you have equal standing before God. You both are children of God because of His love for you. You know what it means to be forgiven. That is crucial for you as you live together as husband and wife. Many times you will need to forgive each other. Many times you will need to help each other overcome your struggles with sin.

3. God is committed to restoring the world.

Look at verses 2 - 4 (read). When a person puts his faith and trust in Christ, the Bible says it is something like a marriage. In fact, Jesus is called the groom and the church or Christians are called

the bride of Christ. And part of God's commitment is to change us and make us more like Himself.

Here where we can find the real help we need. If your spirit is broken, you need to cry out to God and ask Him to restore you. You need His mighty work to burn away the impurities and hurts and heal your wounds. As Christians you know what it's like to enjoy fellowship with the Lord. You know what it's like to be at peace with God. Your relationship with Christ, like a marriage, is to be marked with love and commitment and unity.

So too as husband and wife today, you are to find your relationship with each other to be of the deepest union and communion. Christ is committed to refining us. It's never accurate to say that someone will never change. God is committed to changing and purifying us and our marriages. This is something you can and must trust Him to do.

And so I want to ask you today what kind of marriage do you want – whether you are married today or hope to be some day or are counseling someone who is. The answers to having a loving, growing marriage are found in Christ. Through Him we can have companionship and commitment that will see us through the deepest times.