

## X. *Covenant Infidelity*

04-Feb-07 Malachi 2:10-16

*Theme:* Marital infidelity pictures covenant infidelity; God views both kinds of infidelity as treachery and will not accept worship offered by the unfaithful.

*Key Verses:* Malachi 2:16 <sup>16</sup>“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.”

### Review

Last week we studied the third section of Malachi – 2:1-9. The subject of this passage was the covenant ministry of the priesthood. The priests of Malachi’s day had forgotten their calling and their responsibilities. For that reason, God will curse them, and in fact had already begun to curse them. Their pronouncements of blessing were ineffectual; in fact, the more they blessed people, the less they prospered! God also promised to bring shame upon the priesthood, and eventually to cast them out from His presence, like the offal or dung that was burned as refuse.

Why did God have such harsh words for His priests, His covenant ministers? Because they had corrupted His covenant with Levi, the relationship first established at Mt. Sinai and later strengthened with Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. The tribe of Levi demonstrated zeal for the holiness of God during the incident of the golden calf, and because they were jealous for the LORD, God rewarded them with the priestly ministry. Phinehas is portrayed as the priest *par excellence* for his zeal against physical and spiritual adultery.

Malachi gives us four characteristics of true covenant ministers, who like Phinehas, are zealous for the LORD and for His worship. First, they *revere God* and fear His name. Secondly, they *respect truth*, show impartiality, and administer justice fairly. Thirdly, they *practice holiness* and live lives of ever-increasing obedience and submission to the Word of God. Finally, they *teach godliness*, instructing others in the truth of God’s Word. Malachi describes the impact such covenant ministers have: they turn “many away from iniquity” (2:6).

The priests were supposed to be God’s messengers, but their lifestyles were not consistent with their calling. Even as Malachi excoriates the priests for failing to live up to these standards, he is exhorting all true Christians to follow this pattern of covenant ministry. In this, we look to Jesus Christ, who is everything the Levitical priests were not. He has obtained a more excellent ministry as the perfect Messenger of the covenant, fulfilling the pattern of the covenant with Levi and securing salvation for all those who put their trust in Him.

### Introduction

Today, we come to the heart of Malachi (2:10-16), a passage I’ve entitled “Covenant Infidelity.” In the overall outline of Malachi, this passage is situated in the chiasmic center of the book. In a sense, both halves of the book build up to this central section, which describes covenant unfaithfulness at several different levels. This passage is somewhat difficult to interpret, but the overall thrust is generally clear. Malachi condemns the practice of intermarriage with pagan women. This happened in one of two ways: either direct marriage outside of the covenant, or even worse, by divorcing their Jewish wives and remarrying younger, heathen “trophy wives.” Intermarriage with pagans is one of the major sins that the governor Nehemiah condemned (Neh. 13:23-27).

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However, the passage is not simply about marital infidelity – breaking the marriage covenant – as sinful as that is. Malachi is also condemning spiritual infidelity – breaking God’s covenant. This is a common theme in the prophets. Physical adultery is often connected with covenant infidelity or spiritual adultery. For example, the book of Hosea links these themes together quite strongly in the picture of the prophet’s adulterous wife Gomer, who represents spiritually apostate Israel (Hos. 1:2; 3:1).

By linking marital and spiritual infidelity, Malachi is showing how the one is a picture of the other. God “hates divorce” (2:16) for many reasons; but the chief one highlighted here is because a broken marriage is a picture of the broken covenantal relationship between God and man. And yet, the irony in Malachi is that Judah does not seem to realize that! They violate their marriage vows and then come and offer grain offerings to God as if nothing were wrong (2:12, 13). This effrontery to God happened at all levels of society, including the priesthood. Nehemiah describes how one of the grandsons of the high priest had intermarried a non-Jew:

<sup>28</sup>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. <sup>29</sup>Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites (Nehemiah 13:28-29).

Nehemiah’s action in driving away the priest who had defiled the covenant with Levi (*cp.* 2:4-5) by intermarriage with a non-believer is entirely consistent with what Malachi says here: the offender will be “cut off” (2:12).

There are several key words I wish to highlight before we examine the passage in detail. First, there is the word “covenant,” appearing in verses 10 and 14. In verse 10, the reference is to the Mosaic covenant – the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. In verse 14, the reference is to the covenant of marriage. In each case the covenant has been broken by the sinful actions of men, whether in joining themselves to foreign gods or by forsaking their Jewish wives.

Secondly, the word “treacherously” appears five times in verses 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16. Lest we think that marital infidelity or covenant infidelity is a trivial matter, Malachi gives us God’s viewpoint on the subject: it is nothing less than treachery or treason. Whether a man breaks his marriage vows or his obligations to the LORD, he is a traitor to his covenant commitments.

The third key word in the passage is *minəchāh*, or the grain offering, which occurs in verses 12 and 13. Despite their covenant infidelity, despite their treachery towards their relationship with their wives, these men come before God and offer a grain offering as if they had done nothing wrong! But God is not fooled by their hypocrisy, and He will reject any such offerings, because the one who offers them is not right with God. Let the worshipper beware!

James Jordan points out that this central section of the larger chiasm of Malachi is itself chiastic in structure. He has proposed the following structure, which I have modified slightly:

- a. Covenant treachery is an abomination to God (2:10-11)
- b. Result of treachery against marriage – cut off (from the seed & future) (2:12)
- c. The LORD witnesses the tears of the abused wives (2:13a)
- d. Therefore, God will not accept the grain offering (2:13b)
- c’. The LORD witnesses the covenant of marriage (2:14)
- b.’ Purpose of marriage – raise up godly seed; therefore do not be treacherous (2:15)
- a’. Covenant treachery is hated by God (2:16)

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This chiasmic structure highlights the linkage between marital infidelity and covenant infidelity: because Israel has been unfaithful to their wives, God will not accept them or the works of their hands. Their worship is in vain, because their lives are a living contradiction to God's holy covenant.

### Exposition

#### **A. Treachery of Adultery (2:10-13)**

##### *1. One Father (2:10)*

<sup>10</sup>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? (Malachi 2:10).

Malachi starts out his condemnation of covenant infidelity by asking a series of questions. Right off the bat, we are confronted with an interpretative difficulty. Who is the "one father" that Malachi refers to? Some commentators will refer to Adam as the father of the human race, or Abraham as the father of the Jews, or Jacob as the father of the tribes of Israel. But the parallelism of the second phrase in the verse indicates that the Father is God. Although God is presented as a father in the Old Testament less frequently than in the New Testament, nonetheless, that relationship was clearly enunciated. God tells Moses before the exodus:

<sup>22</sup>Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn"" (Exodus 4:22).

The second interpretative question has to do with God's creation. Is Malachi referring to the original Creation of Genesis 1&2, or to some other creative act? Most commentators (rightly, I believe) suggest that Malachi is talking about the "creation" of the covenant people, Israel, at Mt. Sinai. Since the passage addresses covenant infidelity, it starts out by reminding the people of God that they were created by God as a covenant community:

<sup>6</sup>Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you? (Deuteronomy 32:6).

<sup>1</sup>But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine (Isaiah 43:1).

Having established that God the Father had created them to be a faithful, covenant community, Malachi lets the shoe drop by accusing them of acting "treacherously with one another" and "profaning the covenant of the fathers." From context in the rest of the passage, it seems as if the treachery against one another is violation of marriage vows. The men of Judah are traitors to their wives by committing adultery. The covenant that their heavenly Father made with their human fathers or ancestors at Mt. Sinai included God's provisions against adultery as summarized in the Seventh Commandment (Ex. 20:14). Thus, Malachi is linking violations of the marriage covenant to transgression against the Mosaic covenant.

Previously, Malachi has condemned the "loosey-goosey" attitude of Israel which had led to them offering defiled sacrifices and profaning the worship of the LORD (1:12). But now, Malachi goes further and says that they are profaning God's entire covenant with them. It wasn't enough to disregard God's worship; now they are showing contempt for God's gracious love and redeeming grace on their behalf!

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### 2. Daughter of a Foreign God (2:11)

<sup>11</sup>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 has married the daughter of a foreign god (Malachi 2:11).

Verse 11 spells out for us in more detail the extent of the treachery committed by Judah. There are actually two parallel ideas in this verse. First, there is the moral treachery of marrying foreign wives, wives not specified or permitted under God's covenant with Israel. The law of God clearly prohibited Jews from marrying pagan women outside of God's covenant. The reason for this prohibition was not racial or ethnic; it was religious. This is made clear for us by the expression "the daughter of a foreign god." Baldwin points out that this phrase implies "bearing the character of" a pagan deity, leading to compromise between the marriage partners in the matters of religion. Moses spells out the reason why these marriages were prohibited:

<sup>3</sup>Nor shall you make marriages with them [Canaanites]. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. <sup>4</sup>For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

When you marry someone, you enter into a relationship not only with them, but their entire family. When you marry a pagan, you bring their pagan god into your family. The history of Israel is replete with negative examples about what happens when you unite yourself to "the daughter of a foreign god." Solomon is the prime example, who married seven hundred wives of many nationalities. In his old age, these foreign women turned his heart against the LORD and he worshiped idols and built altars to pagan gods (1 Ki. 11:1-8). If the wisest man in history could have his heart turned against the LORD by daughters of foreign gods, then how likely is it that anyone else would have the same thing happen?

Of course, provision was made in the Mosaic law for an Israelite to marry a foreign convert. Thus, Boaz is free to marry Ruth the Moabitess, because she forsook the gods of Moab and followed the LORD, the God of Naomi and of Israel (Ruth 1:16-17).

The New Testament gives the same commandment as the Old Testament: believing Christians should only marry other Christians. We are not to be "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14), but to "marry only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). Of course, if an unconverted husband or wife becomes a Christian after marriage, he or she is obligated to stay in that marriage (1 Pe. 3:1-2; 1 Cor. 7:12-14).

So, the first treachery Malachi speaks of is the moral violation of God's law by marrying foreign wives, which leads to idolatry and spiritual adultery. The second treachery is the abomination of God's worship. Jordan defines "abomination" as "an extremely severe ceremonial defilement." This abomination or ceremonial defilement is associated with God's "sanctuary" (ESV, NIV, NASB) or temple. Because these foreign wives worship other gods, the worship of the true God is compromised and defiled. Do you see how marital adultery leads to spiritual adultery? Jordan summarizes:

Their marital adultery is parallel to their spiritual adultery toward the Temple. Thus, there is a complex of ideas here. The covenant of marriage is linked with the covenant of the LORD. Profaning marriage is linked to the profaning of the covenant of the LORD. They reject God's Temple and bring in a false temple, the temple of a foreign god.

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Spiritual adultery and physical adultery are linked. Malachi uses adultery in this section to encapsulate all the sins of Israel.

### 3. Cut Off from the Tents of Jacob (2:12)

<sup>12</sup>May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! (Malachi 2:12).

What is the consequence of those who are guilty of marital and spiritual infidelity? Malachi prays that they “may be cut off from the tents of Jacob.” Remember from our study of Obadiah that to be “cut off” is to be excommunicated from the presence of God. The one who is unclean, the one who is unholy, the one who is covered in shame and sin, is the one who is separated or “cut off” from the presence of God (*cp.* Lev. 22:3). Because their worship was an abomination to God, because their offerings were unacceptable, He was going to cut them off from sanctuary worship.

Since these Jews had made their beds (literally!) with the “daughters of foreign gods,” the LORD was going to remove them from the covenant community – the “tents of Jacob.” Obviously they preferred chasing after pagans to worshiping the LORD, and God was going to give them over to their sin. This is the same message that Paul preaches in Romans chapter 1, that God “gave them up” to all sorts of vile and evil passions, because sinful men prefer these wicked pursuits rather than the righteous pursuit of the LORD (*cp.* Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

The middle phrase in verse 12, “being awake and aware,” is difficult to translate and understand. That is why there is a large diversity among various English translations. For example:

<sup>12</sup>The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, *the master and the scholar*, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts (KJV).

<sup>12</sup>May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob, *any descendant of* the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! (ESV).

<sup>12</sup>As for the man who does this, *whoever he may be*, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty (NIV).

<sup>12</sup>May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *anyone who gives testimony in behalf of* the man who does this—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty (NIV optional reading).

<sup>12</sup>As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone who awakes and answers* or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts (NASB).

The KJV follows the Jewish Talmud and the Latin Vulgate, which translates this phrase as “teacher and student.” The ESV doesn’t do a very good job with this phrase, interpreting it as “any descendent of” the guilty man. The NIV is quite confusing, offering two different renderings. The NASB translation is similar to the NKJV and comes closest to the actual Hebrew, which literally means “arousing and responding.” But what does this phrase mean?

I think Jordan hits the mark when he comments that the phrase refers to sexual activity. He points out that the first word, “arousing,” is used repeatedly in Song of Solomon in reference to marital relations (Song 2:7; 3:5; 4:16; 5:2; 8:4). The second word, “responding,” generally means to answer, although a form of this word is used in Exodus 21:10 to refer to marital relations. In context, this phrase “arousing and responding,” seems to be referring to the

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adulterous activities of the unfaithful man. Combined with the reference to the tents of Jacob, it brings to mind the zeal of Phinehas, who speared through the adulterous couple while in their tent at Baal Peor.

In essence, this verse is invoking the ordeal of jealousy against the adulterous man. Remember, the grain offering is part of the ordeal of jealousy ritual (Num. 5:15) and is used in the determination of the unfaithfulness of the adulterous spouse. “So the man who brings a grain offering to the LORD is asking for it. He puts himself right in the position of the ordeal of jealousy because of his covenant unfaithfulness. He will receive the curse” (Jordan).

### 4. Altar Covered with Tears (2:13)

<sup>13</sup>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 (Malachi 2:13).

Malachi describes a second aspect of the same sin. To this point he has been focusing on the adulterous men of Judah. However, the weeping and crying of verse 13 almost certainly refers to the travail of the faithful women who have been wronged by their adulterous husbands. Moore says this shows “the human aspect of the sin and the cruelty that it involved to the Jewish wives.”

Notice how this transgression of the human covenant of marriage again impacts the ceremonial relationship with God. The altar is covered with tears due to sin, rather than a blood sacrifice to remove sin. Instead of covering over sin and pardoning it, sin covers over the place of sacrifice to the point that God will not accept their offerings anymore. The sacrifices on the altar were intended to be a sweet savor and a pleasing aroma to God (Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9; Ps. 66:15; Phil. 4:18). However, the Hebrew text here says literally that God “no longer faces toward the grain offering.” In other words, God turns His back on their offerings and no longer smells the aroma, because the offerings do not please Him. Their offerings stink in His nostrils, and He will not accept the works of their sinful, adulterous hands.

The rejection of their grain offerings, representing the totality of their works, is the central point of this section. Because God views covenant infidelity – whether violation of the marriage covenant or the Mosaic covenant – as treachery, He will no longer accept their worship. It has become an abomination.

## **B. Treachery of Divorce (2:14-16)**

### 1. Wife of Your Youth (2:14)

<sup>14</sup>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 (Malachi 2:14).

The tears of women weeping over wrongs committed by their husbands is at the end of their story. After years of marriage, these unfaithful men have dealt treacherously with their wives. God has been a witness to the breaking of the marriage covenant. But in verse 14 Malachi takes us back to the beginning of the story to remind us that God was also present as a witness when the covenant of marriage was initiated (*cp.* Pr. 2:17). In a Christian wedding, we acknowledge that God is present as a witness. The minister often says something like, “In the presence of God and of all these witnesses, I now pronounce you man and wife.”

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In Genesis 31:50, Laban invokes the LORD as a witness to the marriage between Jacob and his daughters. Laban is warning Jacob not to put aside his daughters or marry anyone else, because although he may not be there to see it or prevent it, God is a witness to the marriage vows that were made. James Jordan points out that here in Malachi “these descendants of Jacob have gone and done exactly what Laban warned against doing. The LORD is the witness in the marriage. Even if nobody else sees it, the LORD does and He will avenge wrongdoing in the marriage.”

Malachi is warning the men of Israel that they are not to put aside the wife of their youth, their companion in marriage, entered into by covenant. As they grow older, they are not to divorce and remarry a younger “trophy wife.” How common is that? It’s very common in our day, and it must have been common 2400 years ago as well. The sinful heart of man has not changed; that is why the Bible and especially books like Malachi still speak so powerfully today.

### 2. *One Nation (2:15)*

<sup>15</sup>But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth (Malachi 2:15).

Verse 15 is another difficult verse to translate from the Hebrew and understand. The first phrase literally says in Hebrew, “and not one he made.” The NASB translates this phrase making “one” the subject: “But not one has done so.” However, most other translations treat “one” as the object and God as the implied subject of the sentence. The NIV actually inserts the name of God into the phrase even though it is not present in Hebrew: “Has not the LORD made them one?”

Assuming that God is the subject and “one” is the object, what is Malachi referring to when He asks the rhetorical question: “And did He not make one?” (ESV)? In context, it appears as if Malachi is referring to the unity of marriage, the joining of a man and a woman together to become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:23-24). Thus, Malachi reminds us of God’s intent for marriage – one man, one woman, united for life. There is no room in this creation mandate to leave the “wife of your youth” for a “trophy wife.”

That leads us to the next interpretative problem. What is the “remnant” (NKJV, NASB), “residue” (KJV, ASV), or “portion” (ESV) of the Spirit? The NIV has taken a different tack, but their translation “in flesh and spirit they are his” relies on emending the Hebrew word from “residue” to “flesh,” which is not warranted. Following older commentators such as T.V. Moore and Patrick Fairbairn, James Jordan explains:

Had God desired to do so, He had enough Spirit to have incorporated all nations into the Sinaitic covenant. Had God done so, marriage to these people would have been okay. He chose, however, to reserve the residue of the Spirit until the time of the Messiah. This was for the purpose of isolating one people and through them producing the godly Seed. In the future the Spirit would be poured out onto all mankind. All women would potentially be acceptable for marriage. For the present, however, He has chosen to make one, to establish godly marriages only within the circle of Israel.

This interpretation fits with the rest of the verse, the rest of the passage, and the book of Malachi as a whole. Malachi has already hinted at the ingathering of the Gentiles (1:5, 1:11) and he will do so again (3:12).

Thus, when Malachi asks, “And why one?”, this question really has two meanings. In the first place, Malachi asks why did God establish a marriage covenant between a man and a woman, to

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make them one flesh? “He seeks godly offspring.” The answer to this question is so that the husband and wife may provide a stable home in which to raise children up “in the training and admonition of the LORD” (Eph. 6:4). Although God does not guarantee that children raised in godly homes will themselves be godly (John 3:5-8; Luke 12:51-53; 1 Tim. 3:4, 12), that should always be our primary prayer for our children.

In the second place, we can interpret the question “why one?” in terms of the unity of the Mosaic covenant. Why did God make Israel the one nation on which He poured out His love and mercy through His covenant? Israel was a unified nation, with “one Father” (2:10) and with the Holy Spirit present as symbolized by the oil in the grain offering. Why did God do this? Again, the answer is, “He seeks godly offspring.” God seeks worshippers, who will worship Him as He commands. But as Malachi has ably demonstrated, the current offspring of Israel were anything but “godly.”

But there is an even deeper meaning to the desire of God to seek godly offspring, or “seed” as it literally reads in Hebrew. Ultimately, the godly seed is realized by the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is the promised “seed of woman” (Gen. 3:15) who comes to conquer death and sin. Abraham is promised that through his seed “all families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). God entered into His covenant with Israel at Sinai in order to establish one nation in which the promised Seed would come.

The explanation of God’s purpose in seeking godly offspring comes with a warning: “therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (2:15b). God has given of His Spirit to create the covenant people and to witness the covenant of marriage between men and women. In the same manner, we are to guard our own spirits to ensure that we comply with the terms of these covenants. Malachi warns his readers to be careful not to offend the Spirit of God, lest He cut you off from the tents of Jacob and from the blessings of the Seed to come.

Because Malachi has so intertwined the twin concepts of marital fidelity and spiritual fidelity in terms of covenants, the phrase “wife of his youth” can bear two meanings. The obvious meaning relates to the marriage covenant: “the Israelites were putting aside their Hebrew wives once they grew older and were remarrying younger, pagan women. So they are called to remain faithful to the wife of their youth” (Jordan). However, this phrase can also point back to the covenant relationship established by God at Mt. Sinai with His bride, the nation of Israel. Just as God always remains faithful, so too are the people of God called to remain faithful to Him.

### 3. *Garment Covered with Violence (2:16)*

<sup>16</sup>“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” (Malachi 2:16).

Malachi ends this section on covenant infidelity by a strong statement: God “hates divorce.” Literally, the Hebrew text reads that God hates “putting away,” but divorce is implied by context. Why does God hate divorce? Because it represents the tearing or rending of the covenant. Not only is the covenant of marriage broken, but the covenant relationship between man and God is also broken. Boice explains:

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 believing man or woman

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with Christ, the divine bridegroom of the church—and divorce must therefore illustrate apostasy or the falling away of a man or woman from God, which is damnation.

T. V. Moore says that “the word ‘garment’ was used among the Hebrews to designate the conjugal relation (see Dt. 22:30; Ruth 3:9; Ez. 16:8). Thus, covering a garment with violence refers to the damage done to the marital covenant through adultery.

The only other usage of the word “hate” in Malachi was in 1:3 where God “hates Esau.” There, God’s hatred of Esau implied covenant separation: Jacob was chosen by God’s love, but Esau was rejected and excluded from God’s covenant. The implication here is that those who behave in the way Malachi has been condemning – those who show contempt for their marital covenant and God’s covenant – are in danger of being separated from God. They will be cut off from the tents of Jacob, and instead will be joined to the tents of Esau (Jordan). Thus, Malachi repeats his previous warning: “Take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (2:16b).

### Conclusion

Is divorce the unpardonable sin? Does divorce automatically preclude you from ever receiving God’s mercy and grace? No! Like any other sin, divorce can be forgiven if it is repented of. But when the sins of adultery and divorce become a lifestyle, without repentance, then God’s condemnation and wrath is poured out. That was the situation in Malachi’s day that the prophet so strongly condemned. The apostle John spells out the difference:

<sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup>No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God (1 John 3:7-9).

Although the Mosaic Law did have a provision for divorce (Dt. 24:1-4), Jesus said it was only “because of the hardness of your hearts” (Mt. 19:8). The pattern God intended from creation was one man, one woman, united in marriage for life (Mt. 19:4-6). However, the Bible does permit remarriage after divorce in only a few cases: adultery by the other spouse (Mt. 5:32; 19:9); or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:15) (see also WCF XXIV.5, 6). Of course, reconciliation is always preferred over divorce. Divorce should be the last resort, not the easy way out.

We need to realize that God has quite a high view of the covenant of marriage. After all, He established it! But even more than that, the marriage relationship between a husband and wife is a picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. To break the one is to do violence against the other. This is why God speaks here quite strongly against marital infidelity, because it is a picture of covenant infidelity. God views both kinds of infidelity as treachery and will not accept worship offered by the unfaithful. Therefore, we are called to guard our spirits; to guard ourselves against any violation of a covenantal relationship – whether with a spouse or with God.

Next week: Lesson 11 – Covenant Purification – Malachi 2:17-3:6

Close in Prayer.