

Reading: Malachi 2:10-16

Theme: Detestable things to the Lord.

Malachi challenged the people of Judah about their breaking the covenant of their father's and their treacherous dealings against their fellow Jews in breaking faith with them. They forgot the unity of origin and of covenant, but were united in treachery against each other. They did not mean to be treacherous, to break faith, but they were as they ignored the word of God, making God and His commands insignificant. The Lord, through Malachi now drives home the general principle as it worked out in one area in different ways - their marriages and even re-marriages.

This section will challenge us concerning the area of marriage and divorce. God has given principles, directions and commands for both these areas for all people and especially His own people. We are to let the word of God affect and control this most personal area of our lives. The God we serve is to be our God in public life, our private life and our married life. God's word has something to say about our workplaces, the boardroom, the sitting-room, dining room and even the bedroom! In v 11-16 Malachi will drive truths home about the married lives of Judah and highlight it was a stinking offence to God, which hindered their worship and prayers. Let's see these 2 areas:

1. Marriage in Malachi's time. (V11-12) I have 2 subheadings for this:

A. A Detestable Thing (v11): There were **wrong marriages** in disobedience to what God had said in OT, the Jews at that time were marrying those of other nations (Nehemiah 13:23, Ezra 9:1-2). We need to understand the OT never forbids marriage to those outside of Israel on **racial grounds**. We note a number who took marriage partners from other nations e.g. Exodus - people from other nations left Egypt with the Israelites (Exodus 12:38); Moses' wife was from another nation. Both Rahab from Jericho and Ruth from Moab believed in the Lord, were accepted and married Israelites - both women are part of the ancestry of the Lord Jesus. God's objection to marrying those from other nations was **not racial, but religious** e.g. Deuteronomy 7:1-4 - God makes this clear - for foreign partners could so easily turn the hearts of the Israelites from true worship of the true God. God knew the terrible effect it could have in leading His chosen, set apart, holy and loved people away from His ways

and into idolatrous worship - so profaning the covenant, breaking faith with God and affecting how they dealt with one another.

In v11 the Lord calls it a detestable thing, an abomination (AV) - it had spread through the people at that time. So much so, the Lord said it had desecrated “*the holiness of the Lord*” (AV); “*the sanctuary of the Lord*” (NIV and others); “*the Lord’s holy institution*” (NKJV) which He loves. The Lord didn’t want His holy, loved and chosen people to become compromised by sin, profaning His covenant, doing detestable, disgusting things. The Jews were doing it lightly, unthinkingly in marrying the daughters of a foreign god, a strange god (AV). The phrase indicates the women were still active in the worship of a false god, an idol, which she considered her “father”. Such was detestable to God **their** Father, who they should honour and respect (1:6).

Imagine the shock of the people as maybe they’d never thought of that, even mocked Malachi - saying he could not be serious; even telling him to mind his own business as they were not hurting anyone. Yet God called it breaking faith, dealing treacherously with other Jews and a detestable thing. They were profaning the very thing the Lord had designed for their good and benefit, to help them maintain, develop their walk and worship with the Lord. One old writer quotes a Jewish rabbi “*He that marries a heathen woman is as if he made himself son-in-law to an idol.*” This was detestable to the Lord and even ensnared someone as wise as Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-13).

How do we apply this to ourselves? Is it still a detestable thing for a believer to deliberately marry a non-Christian? Does it mean we would then still break faith with the unity of God’s people? Personally, I feel Scripture is clear about this. Sadly, many young people who are professing believers and even their parents will justify, excuse, rationalise this point when it comes to them and their children, but the word of God **is clear** in such matters. If a Jew marrying a pagan, a nonbeliever was compared to desecration of the sanctuary, or even blasphemy against God, then we are to consider how a Christians marrying non-Christians compares to the situation we have here in Malachi.

In NT, the sanctuary which the Lord lives in is our lives and heart. He is to rein there as King, as Lord and He has said that we are not to be unequally yoked i.e. married to an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14) which is said for our best, His glory and certainly not spoil our lives! Can we then turn around and ignore, neglect or deliberately disobey such and not think this is a serious matter? What are we saying to God about how we value Him and His standards by ignoring this? It is tough enough in the Christian life when both husband and wife are Christians, how much harder will it be if we deliberately marry a non-Christian, someone who could grow to resent our Christian life and faith as the years go on! They will, even as our marriage partners, come from different point of view - in the home, bringing up any children they have and there be tensions caused by different priorities and different influences.

Yes, the non-Christian partner may be wonderful, kind, loving and very moral, but they will not love Christ. A non-Christian may have many admirable characteristics, but they will not be Christ-like, there will not be true godliness or the fruit of the Spirit. Would such a marriage reveal what is the priorities in the Christian's heart - not to honour God wholeheartedly? A Christian doing this could well give the impression that God's word is not important but what they want is **more** important! No doubt we all know of Christians who marry a non-Christian and somewhere along the line the non-Christian has been converted. This shows us something of God's amazing grace, but it is unbiblical, unwise to presume on God's grace. I can show you many more instances where that has not happened and the Christian's walk with God has been devastated and even fossilised. Yes, lovely marriages, lovely families, but missing out on a close living relationship with God.

This situation is totally different to situation to non-Christians who are married and one is later converted. The Lord understands that situation and is very tender about it. God's grace has brought about their salvation after they were married and He wants them to live as a witness, light within their marriage and family. He is able to give them the grace to live as they should. The NT is very clear that there should not be a seeking by the Christian to have a way out of the marriage on religious reasons. Such may feel they are the only one in their family who is a Christian, but God's

plan could be that they are the **first** and God could use them to live out and bring the gospel to their family and marriage partner.

B. A Devastating Thing (v12): Here the Lord, through Malachi, smashes into the people who did such - whether **deliberately or even unthinkingly**, God says things that are quite devastating - whoever they were, they would be cut-off from the tents, the tabernacles of Jacob. To be cut-off in OT sense was to be denied access to God's people and the means of grace whoever they were. (*Hebrew here is difficult to translate and make sense of - different versions will translate it in different ways*). This is devastating - they felt ok, fine - these wives, husbands. God said it was a serious sin and they could be cut-off from the people of Israel and would be considered an apostate.

Nehemiah and Ezra had no time for such ones in positions of leadership who should have known better. I do not like being too hard on such ones, but try to show them gently the folly of doing such. I am not a Malachi – a man suited to his times, but I would gently counsel, pray for and with such disobedient believers. I haven't had to do such, but do wonder if they continued to disobey God's word, if there should be church discipline of some kind! It is so important to be praying for our young people, young adults and their future marriage partners - that God would make them and their life partners godly men and women who will remain true to God in their generation. Pray for wisdom and gentleness for the church officers if we have to deal with such a situation, so we show true love and care for them, but honour God above all. Moving on we see the contrary situation:

2. Divorce in Malachi's time (v13-16): The Lord's message went on to show there were also **wrong divorces** going on too. 3 sub-points from the NIV text:

A. He no longer pays attention (v13): the people of Malachi's days went through the routines of worship - going to the temple, giving offerings, even approaching the altar and breaking their hearts. Yet it was as if the Lord was paying no attention to those things, was decidedly unimpressed by such! The people were asking "*Why?*" Malachi delivers a pastoral message to the people to show why it was occurring. We will look at this, but don't think I am saying that if our spiritual life is dry and barren, then

this is the cause. It may be a possible cause if we are hanging onto or cultivating sinful ways etc. As I open up these verses, I am dealing with the situation in Malachi's day and if it applies to us, I pray God will give us grace to listen and obey Him.

B. The Lord is acting as the witness (v14): it seems many of the Jewish men had grown bored, tired of their wives and just simply traded them in for a newer version, especially newer foreign-god worshipping versions! They divorced and put away their wives. See how it is put in v14 *“the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”* The Lord witnessed these terrible actions. It is not hard to imagine the situation as their wives had grown older, were past their best in terms of figure, youth, sexuality and desirability and some Jewish men hitch up with pagan dolly birds! All the love and care of the wife is forgotten for a younger woman. Sadly, such seems a familiar event in our day and can even occur in churches as Christian marriages are not immune from such. Now, as then, we are to be warned the seriousness of such a course of action.

God witnessed and knew what was going on even before it became public and He knew the secret affairs, thoughts, desires, deeds and actions. It always breaks faith with the husband or wife, the person you are joined, united with in God's sight, to whom you made promises to and these are often the wife or husband of your youth and yet can be so readily cast off. Matthew Henry wrote *“Let not the darling of your youth be the scorn and loathing of thy age!”* Such are to be our lifetime partner and companion - they have shared and been with us in all the ups and downs, good and bad, sickness and health since marriage. They are not to be simply dumped, but to be loved, cared for as an equal, to help and be a helper, to support and be a support, to encourage and be an encouragement. They are sharers in the covenant we made together - not only before people, but before God, who witnesses every marriage.

God's original design for marriage for all people, but especially in this context the nation of Israel, is shown us in v15. The start of this verse is not easy to translate and make sense of - AV translates it to speak of God's original creation of mankind with Adam and Eve - one man and one

woman in marriage. NIV translates it to speak of the Lord making them one - whether of Adam and Eve or every marriage relationship since.

For all marriages, if blessed with children, God wants the children to be brought up in His ways - especially so for the Jews as they had to teach of God by example, practice, also teach their children God's word - through their lives too. He wanted their children to come to honour and love the same God, to become godly offspring. OT shows this often. The same is true for Christian marriages blessed with children - above everything else we desire for our children; **our greatest desire** is to be they will be godly, follow and serve the same Lord Jesus as we do. We are to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord, but not in a harsh, regimental way, but joyfully, living out the truths and be examples to them in every area of our lives.

Back to the text - the putting away of Jewish wives and taking idol worshipping wives would hinder this; even encourage their children in idolatrous ways, causing many to despise and further forsake the covenant of the Lord with His people and give low views of marriage and moral standards. Our marriages can affect our children - for better or worse - in their marriage relationships. They are to see marriage modelled by us. I remember reading someone saying that the best example he could give to their son concerning marriage, was to be the best husband he could be to his wife. Realise God witnesses our marriages – words, attitudes, thoughts and actions.

In v16 we see God's view of the wrong divorces going on - He hated it. Yet in OT He made provision for divorce, so what is going on? God's original ideal plan and purpose did not include divorce, but because of sin, the sinfulness of people's hearts, He allowed it and prevents the kind of dreadful misery sinful people can inflict on one another when locked together in a hateful, cold, manipulative and loveless marriages. God allows divorce in His ongoing grace to hard-hearted sinners, nevertheless He hates divorce. All divorce is occasioned by sin somewhere along the line and can be the lesser of 2 evils. God desires there was no evil or sin. Here God underlines He saw, witnessed what they were doing lightly and because of their deliberate actions He could no longer pay attention to their worship, prayer life etc.

Divorce is no trivial matter and many of us here have family members, friends and they themselves are personally affected by divorce and know something of the devastating effects on the divorcees and their children. Though the Lord hates divorce, it does not mean He hates the divorcees - even the guilty parties who provoked the divorce. God in His grace and mercy can save such ones, can use such, can bless and use the future relationship and marriage. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. The Bible gives us God's pattern for marriage- even for divorce. We are to pray for marriages, Christian marriages and realise that such relationships are under attack. God is a witness in all marriages and so He not only lets the people here know that, but urges them:

C. Guard yourself in your spirit (v15-16): here the emphasis is not *“Do not do these things”* - while that is right; nor is it *“Don't get caught”* or *“Don't excuse it”*, but *“Guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”* Whatever our age or how long we've been married it is possible to break faith within our marriage covenant in our actions, but we can also do it in our imagination, thought life. People have walked out of marriages although they have stayed in place physically! The Lord warns about committing adultery by what we think and it is not just restricted to our actions. This is why we need to guard our spirits else we can be breaking faith by what we think and desire. Such thoughts can hinder our spiritual life, our praying and even our spiritual vitality.

We are aware of God's warning of resentment, bitterness, disharmony and disunity in the church, but may fail to recognise such things are not to be there in our marriages. It can be a sadness to see husbands and wives over the years come to almost despising one another, or where a husband has not fulfilled, or been encouraged or allowed to fulfil His God ordained role as head of the relationship and of the home. We are to cultivate our marriages as the word of God directs, else they can hinder our own spiritual lives and even the spiritual life of the church. Is that too far-fetched? Yet, isn't this what we read here in Malachi in the Lord's words to Judah?

Problems in Judah began by failing to guard their spirits, as they allowed wrong thoughts, fantasies, dreams, aspirations to develop, mature and turn into actions. Recognise the real problems of such thoughts can be more common than we realise even among Christians and most definitely in society. We are to classify such thoughts as a deadly enemy to our spiritual well-being and health. We are not to treat sinful wandering, marriage-covenant-breaking thoughts as anything less than sin. All of us will have tensions and sources of irritation in our marriages, but they need to be sorted out before they fester and break out in open hatred. Even someone like Martin Luther and his wife Katie had differences and he is reported as saying *“All my life is patience - I have to have patience with the Pope, the heretics, my family and Katie!”*

In our marriages we need to understand each other, our needs, our emotions, so to be wise and take appropriate actions or words to remove the irritation, the difficulties. We are to take right action to remove sinful thoughts in our lives, to avoid that which will inflame wrong thoughts. Within marriage it is always good to keep on courting your husband or wife. We should not let that friendship with the love of our youth become stale, jaded, fossilised by the passage of time, by the stresses of life. It is only in fairy tales that marriages go on happily ever after, because in a real marriage both are sinners, saved by God’s grace if Christians, but sin will be in that relationship. Each partner is to guard themselves in their spirit, so as not break faith with each other.

I pray that this bang up-to-date passage teaches the important of guarding and watching our spirits so that we can live as God has revealed and we can be positive examples to those around us and to young people so that they would want the type of marriage relationship we have, as we do all we can to keep faith and honour God in our lives, within and through our marriages.