

**Text:** Malachi 2:10-17

**Title:** Idolatry and Divorce

**Truth:** God hates idolatry and divorce.

**Date/Location:** Sunday May 26, 2019 at FBC

## Introduction

Remember that God gave Malachi a half dozen messages to proclaim to the people of Israel. We looked at the first, in which God states His love for Israel and hatred toward Edom. We also studied the second, in which God rebuked the priests for their bad practices regarding the altar, their bad attitudes, and their need for repentance. They were not honoring God in any manner like they should.

Now Malachi is going to relay a third message, this one about idolatry and divorce. The two ideas are connected. Read on to find out how.

### I. God as Father, v. 10

God is father in several senses in the Bible. I think that the first two are indicated in verse 10:

- A. The Fatherhood of God can refer to His relationship to creation (Psalm 100:3). God is the originator of all things, so in that sense, He is the “father” of everything, whether the cosmic creation, the earth and sub-human creation, believers, unbelievers, nations, etc. See also Acts 17:29; Ephesians 3:14-15.
- B. The Fatherhood of God can also refer to God’s special covenant relationship with Israel. In this relationship, God treats Israel as a son because He has adopted the nation for His own (Exodus 4:23). The people should recognize this special relationship and take it seriously. The God of the nation is, in this sense, the father of the nation. Similarly with other nations, their idols = pagan gods were their national parents. So God speaks about “daughter of a foreign god” in 2:11. This refers to an unbelieving woman.
- C. Related to the above is that the king, in this case God, was considered a “father” because he was over the nation as leader,

provider, protector, etc. God was also “father” over the theocratic king once that phase of the Israelite kingdom began with David and Solomon (2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7, Psalm 89:26-27).

- D. In the New Testament, Christians are privileged to be able to address God as Father in a slightly different sense, and that is as Father of their personal redemption. God graciously permits us to call out to Him as “Abba/Father” according to Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. We pray to our “Father in heaven” (Mat. 6:9). The heavenly father language is characteristic and pretty much exclusive to the New Testament, especially in the gospels.<sup>1</sup> Since the sayings of Jesus were presented in the gospels and this was prior to the cross and New Testament church era, I believe it is appropriate to recognize that Israelites under the old covenant could also understand this personal adaptation of the concept, if they were redeemed. In other words, it was not just a national connection they had to God, but a two-fold personal one through creation and redemption, besides the fact that God was their King.
- E. Very significant is the repetition of the word *one* in the first two clauses of verse 10. We have *one* Father and *one* creator God. This mirrors Ephesians 4:6 which serves as a basis for Paul’s call to Christian unity. In this passage, the function of *one* is similarly weighty. The nuance here is that if God is our Father by creation and national adoption, we should not depart from Him, we should not break the covenant He made with our forefathers, and we should not be treacherous in our behavior toward one another—our brothers and sisters.

## II. Marriage to Pagan Women, v. 10-12

But that is just exactly what Israel was doing. Malachi lays out two specific charges: First, Judah has turned to idolatry through marriage to foreign women, who were followers of idols. Second, that they divorced their Israelite wives to do so.

- A. **Judah** was treacherous—that is, the people of the southern kingdom. This is reiterated by the second phrase of verse 11, where God says an abomination had been committed in **Israel** and

---

<sup>1</sup> Although see Isaiah 9:6.

**Jerusalem.** The entire nation—or what was left of it—was guilty, from top to bottom. The explanation of this treachery is that the people had profaned the holy covenant. Some act that they did was a sin that broke the whole covenant.

- B. The act was that they “married the daughter of a foreign god.” Collectively, the people were guilty of intermarriage with pagan women who were the “daughters” of a foreign god. These intermarriages were idolatrous and led the Jewish husbands to tolerate and even practice idolatry.

Think about Solomon. One as “wise” as he was at one time was led astray into idolatry (1 Kings 11:3-8). Many of his people five or six centuries later were doing the same thing.

- C. Because religious unfaithfulness is closely connected to marital status and marital sins, the Lord often used the idea of adultery in a spiritual sense. The people were marrying unbelieving women and were thus led into spiritual adultery against their God (Judges 3:5-7).

1. This was the very temptation faced by the sons of Jacob a thousand years earlier (Gen. 34:16). The intermarriage for them amounted to the two groups becoming one people.
2. It was this very sin that both Ezra and Nehemiah had to address in the community of God’s nation (Ezra 9:2-15 and following; and Nehemiah 13:23-29).

- D. Theologically, the whole thing is an issue of separation. They were not maintaining their personal or corporate holiness. Their laws should have outlawed marriage to women who believed other gods (or men, too). Actually, the Jewish God-given law did prohibit that (Exodus 34:12-16)—if only obeyed!

1. This is not the case of Boaz and the foreigner Ruth, because Ruth had professed utter loyalty to the God of her mother-in-law Naomi (Ruth 1:16). She was no longer a follower of the Moabite gods. So it is not mere interracial marriage that is prohibited. It is believer+unbeliever or people-of-God+non-people-of-God marriage that is wrong.

- E. The problem of sinful intermarriage had to be remedied. It could only be fixed by divorcing those wives who had been married illegally according to the Law of Israel. That's what Ezra and Nehemiah did (Ezra 9–10). This kind of divorce is not the normal kind of divorce that we think of today, which is the breaking of a legitimate union. There, it was the clean-up of an illegitimate union.
- F. Verse 12 presents Malachi's hope for the situation: may those unrepentant ones who have done this be "cut off" from the tent of Jacob, which means the house of Jacob. To be cut off means to be killed. If the people hang on to their sin, the only remedy will be their demise.
1. Who is the person who deserves this fate? The man who is "awake and aware." This seems to mean that the person is "in the know" about God's requirements. It could refer to a guard who is awake (like a priest who knows God's requirements) and someone who is made aware of these requirements. In any case, in Israel it referred to everybody, for everyone was either awake or aware. No one could claim ignorance of this most basic principle.
  2. It is also for the person who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts. In other words, they sin on the one hand, and try to act religious on the other. Religious hypocrisy is sickening to God.
- G. We all know that if you are a Christian believer, you should absolutely not marry an unbeliever. 2 Cor. 6:14 is completely clear about this matter. We are "awake and aware."

---

### **III. Pretend Religion, v. 13-14a**

- A. The second charge against Judah was that they wept and cried over the altar of God, as if their display of emotionalism could move God to grant them favor while their lives were deep in sin. This primarily focuses upon the priests, who were able to closely approach the altar in the temple. The non-priestly class also seems to have participated in this emotional display. Again, it was all hypocrisy.

1. God would not “regard” such an offering. He would not accept it for its intended purpose, whether a vow or a thank offering, or even a sin offering. His face was against these evildoers (1 Peter 3:12).
  2. I believe we can apply from this passage that monetary offerings to church ministries in this day and age have a similar place—you can offer all the money you want, but if your heart is not right with God, it will amount to nothing as far as your account goes. In other words, it will be no treasure laid up in heaven for you. Still, the church ministry might turn it into something useful, but that will be credit to the church folks who do participate with a good heart!
  3. Mere emotional outbursts that are attached to the name of God are not sufficient evidence of true religion. Real faith is displayed in plain-old, boring, run-of-the-mill *obedience*. If you want to display true religion, stop dallying around with idols. And maintain a good marriage (see below)! That goes a lot farther than any sacrifices.
- B. The people respond much like the priests in 1:6, apparently claiming innocence, or at least ignorance. “Why doesn’t God receive our offerings? (Paraphrasing) He should! They are as good as anyone else’s offerings, aren’t they?” No, they are not. Though they are the same substance (animal sacrifice), they are *not* offered in proper faith. *Faith* is what makes the entire offering effectual. The people have sunk to a low place spiritually, as evidenced by the fact that they don’t “get” this. They want what they want (see next) and that blinds their minds to the obvious.

#### IV. Divorce from the Wife of Your Youth, v. 14b-17

- A. God confronts the people with this underlying reason for His disgust.
1. God *had* been witness to their marriage vows. Think of that, my friends. “We are gathered today **before God** and these witnesses to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony...” The marriage ceremony is the initiation of a holy covenant between a man and “the wife of his youth.” On the wife of one’s

youth, see Prov. 5:18 and Isaiah 54:6. This was the bride, who often was very young when married (as early as 15 years old). But it was the man's youthfulness that is pointed out—he had married fairly young, as most men did in that culture.

2. But the men dealt treacherously with their wives—and God was witness to that as well. These wives were their companions, their helps, their mates, their wives by covenant. They had agreed to forsake all others only for their one wife.
- B. Such an exclusive union pleases God, for He wants marriage to continue as He originally designed it. He originally made Adam and Eve *one* (Gen. 2:24). In marriage, they were to produce a godly offspring. He wanted them to raise godly children. But first, they had to be married to have legal sex to conceive children. Then, they had to be faithful to one another to provide the best environment to raise godly children. Adultery, divorce, polygamy, pornography, and the like are absolutely devastating to the raising of godly children. Take this to the bank.
- D. Therefore, no one is allowed to deal treacherously with his wife. In this context, that means to be unfaithful to her, and ultimately to divorce her in favor of some “pretty pagan thing”<sup>2</sup> down the street. The man thinks more of the woman he is going after than he does of his wife, and also more than he thinks of his God.
- E. There is a difficult part in verse 15 about the “remnant of the Spirit”. It appears that the text is indicating that Holy Spirit is involved in the uniting of two people in marriage. This makes marriage a most spiritual kind of event. To throw it out the window is the height of arrogance and a slap in God's face.
- F. Regarding verse 16 and God hating divorce, I take the interpretation offered in the NAS, NKJV, and NET translations.
1. The issue is not merely “aversion divorce” as in a man who “hates and divorces.” All divorce has to do with hate, so “hatred divorce” is a redundant idea. In context, what Malachi and God

---

<sup>2</sup> I use that form of statement to indicate how the adulterous man thinks of his wife and the other woman he is going after—as objects. Such a thought pattern and treatment of a woman is highly inappropriate, but it is nonetheless all too common.

are emphasizing here has to do with divorce to free up the man to marry an idolater, likely because of lust for that daughter of the other god. By definition such a man hates his wife. What kind of man would consign his wife to a divorced state of poverty to chase after another woman—after promising to be faithful to her for the rest of their lives?

2. The fact is that God hates all sin (see Prov. 6:16-19), and He hates the sin of divorce. There are *precious few* cases where divorce is a workable answer to a broken marriage situation, and the list of such cases is usually much smaller than most people who are contemplating divorce would like. There are *absolutely no* cases where divorce is a righteous and wonderful thing. This is why God hates it. Even the divorce laws of the Old Testament were given only as a concession because of the hardness of the hearts of the people (Deut. 24:1, Mark 10:5). If you want to be like them, go right ahead, but don't expect good results.

G. Whatever view you take of the above question, divorce covers your garments, symbolically speaking, with the blood of a murderer. You break the union, the oneness, the vow, the promise, the covenant. You actually cut it asunder. It bleeds. Therefore God commands His people *not* to deal treacherously with their wives. They must maintain fidelity to God, and part of the way of doing that is to maintain fidelity to their wives. "Take heed to your Spirit," says God, "and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth."

1. So it is for you today as well. Take heed to your inner life, thoughts, and attitudes. Take heed to any bitterness that you may be holding against your spouse. God's will is that you work to make your marriage a wonderful, pleasant, spiritually-vibrant, enjoyable relationship.
2. Gentlemen, you do that in part by forsaking all others, whether in the flesh or in print or in pixels. And you do that by focusing your energy—*all* of your energy—on your wife.

H. In verse 17, the people talk back against God again, this time asking “how have we wearied God?” God replies that the people were making this claim in their thinking and speaking with one another:

1. “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.”
2. “God delights in them [the ones who do evil].” This and the previous statement are simply backwards from reality.
3. “Where is the God of justice?” So much evil was going on around them that some were functionally atheists. They were saying there is no God of justice, and therefore no God.

They really thought they were innocent. They were so sinful and so deceived that they could not fathom how Malachi was talking righteousness to them. Perhaps they had constructed elaborate excuses and explanations of how their conduct was right. Sinners can always do that. Their justifications could be empty and unable to hold the weight of their behavior, but their sin doesn’t allow them to see that. They are *blinded* by their own darkness.

## Conclusion

Things are not well in the moral condition of Malachi’s audience. They are hard-hearted—from priest down to people. Some of the men are divorcing their wives in favor of idolatrous women from the surrounding nations. They are not equally yoked in the end, and have been treacherous toward the wife of their youth.

Divorce is a very religious action. It is making a statement, not just about your spouse, but about your God (or god). Divorce is profane. Don’t use the word. It is dirty.

MAP