

The Consequences of Breaking Faith¹

Malachi 2:10-16

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If you have been with us over the last several weeks you know that we are in the middle of a series through the book of Malachi. Malachi is the final prophet in the Old Testament and brought God's last word to the people of Israel before four hundred years of silence – silence God unexpectedly broke by putting on flesh and moving into the neighbourhood.

And as it usually is with last words, Malachi's punches are powerful and direct – he didn't care about being politically correct, he didn't care how people felt about what he had to say; he simply brought God's word to God's people as he received it.

And Malachi's words are just as powerful, as politically incorrect today as the day they were spoken, and they are also just as relevant. Today, God, through Malachi, calls us to be people who don't give into the temptation to break faith with the people around us, by marrying unbelievers, or divorcing our spouses.

Please turn with me to Malachi chapter 2 starting in verse 10. If you are using a pew Bible today you will find it on page 676. Let's pray that God would give us the grace to be able to receive His words today.

[Pray]

As we dig into the text today I am very aware that Malachi is dealing with sins that, as Canadians in the 21st century, we would rather not talk about. But the thing with God's word is that while it is sharper than any double-edged sword and so penetrates to divide between soul and spirit² killing pride and wounding self-righteousness, it also heals leading us to salvation, training us in righteousness, and equipping us to live lives that honour God.³

And so while it is rarely comfortable to encounter God's word, the deep cuts we receive from it are the cuts of a skillful surgeon, that are essential if we are going to image our Creator – and brothers and sisters this is something I long for more than my personal comfort, and I hope you do as well.

As we get started let's remind ourselves of Malachi's greater context – we are going to need it if we are going to be able to endure his words in chapter 2. And

¹ Outline adapted from John Piper's sermon "Let None Be Faithless to the Wife of his Youth" <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/let-none-be-faithless-to-the-wife-of-his-youth> Accessed June 3, 2013.

² Hebrews 4:12

³ 1 Timothy 3:15-17

we get this greater context from chapter 1 and verse 2 where we receive the first words of God to His people; the words “I have loved you.”

These are God’s words of unconditional acceptance and covenant that come before any of His words of conviction. That means before we followed God He loved us. Before we pledged ourselves to obey His commands He loved us. And before we performed any acts of righteousness that might have attracted His mercy, He loved us. Our God is a God who loves unconditionally.

This is the same God who revealed Himself to Moses telling him who He was by saying:

[I Am] “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34:6)

Isn’t that good news? If God was not a God of love and mercy and forgiveness, there would be no way to endure the weight of His words of chastisement. Because let’s face it, every person in this room stands condemned by the word of God. We are all guilty of sin, and none of us would survive now or on judgment day aside from His grace. Amen?

So let’s look now at our text; Malachi chapter 2 verses 10-16. The thesis that I want to prove to you from these words is as follows: **Breaking faith by marrying a non-believer or divorcing your spouse can sever your relationship with God.**

Look with me at verse 10.

[Read Malachi 2:10]

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There is one word that comes up five times in our passage today and makes up the central thought of this section, and it appears here in verse 10 for the first time. And that is the Hebrew word “*bagad*” which can be translated “deal treacherously”, “be faithless”, or “break faith”. Here Malachi asks: “why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?” Breaking faith happens when you promise you are going to be somewhere but you don’t show up; you pledge to do something or pay someone but then you don’t follow through. Instead you break faith.

Last week we looked at verse 8 where God criticized the spiritual leaders of the community – their priests and our pastors – for “teaching in a way that caused many to stumble.”

And today’s text follows on the footsteps of that verse. Here we are looking at a couple examples of the ways the people in Malachi’s day and our own stumble

and break faith with each other as a result of a priesthood that was not giving them the word of God.

So this is both an important word for you, and it is an important word for me.

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The first thing we need to know as we look at this text is who are we talking about breaking faith with?

In verse 10, he says “Have we not all one Father?” So Malachi starts out talking about breaking faith with brothers and sisters who share God as Father. That’s us, the people you are sitting beside.

And so far Malachi is speaking generally about any kind of breaking faith whether that occurs in business relationships or a romantic relationships or any other kind of relationships. When we break faith with our brothers or sisters we betray the family of God, distain our own flesh, and dishonour our Father. So don’t break faith, don’t break your word or your promises with your Christian siblings because when you do this you attack your own family.

But second he adds “Did not one God create us?” Here Malachi gets even more general, making what he has to say apply to every relationship we have, even with non-believers. Since we all have the same Creator we can expect our Creator to have the same standards for all of us. And that Creator’s standard is that we not break faith with each other because He is not a faith breaking Creator.

If you say you are going to be there, then be there. If you say you are going to pay for something, then pay for it. If you pledge faithfulness, then be faithful.

Even though its hard this is God’s will for us. If we are going to image our Creator, if we are going to look like Jesus then we must be people who do not break faith with each other.

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Now look ahead to verse 12. Here, just in case we don’t think this is really all that big a deal, God gives us the consequences for our breaking faith.

[Read Malachi 2:12-14a]

Without belaboring this, do you see how serious our breaking faith is to God? Have you wondered why your prayers go unanswered, why God seems distant?

If yes, have you chosen to live a life of breaking faith with those around you? God says when we do this He will not hear our prayers even when we weep and wail at His alter or when we bring offerings before Him.

Just as we looked at during our communion time God says our relationships with each other affect our relationship with Him and this is especially true – as we are going to see – when those relationships are marriage relationships...

Breaking faith by marrying a non-believer or divorcing your spouse can sever your relationship with God.

Friends, I understand that this is a sensitive topic. Like last week's passage which was looking at sin in the pastorate, this isn't a topic I would have chosen, but this is what happens when you preach the word of God. And so I urge you to hear God's word spoken to the people He loves.

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Before we get into the thick of it when we come to a topic like this there are so many questions that we want answered. For example we want to know "What do I do if someone breaks faith with me?" Am I free to retaliate? Or "What should I do if my child marries a non-believer?" Or "What if my spouse wants to divorce me?"

These are serious questions, and they are questions that the Bible gives us answers for, but we must be super careful that when we come to a text we only ask questions of the text that the text answers.

For example two weeks ago we looked briefly at the 5th commandment which says "honour your Father and Mother", and we noted that this verse was not talking to parents, but was talking to children. And so it would be wrong to use this verse to talk about how it is important to be good parents. There are other verses in the Bible that talk about that; this just isn't one of them.

And in the same way, God has some specific words to say to us today and some specific questions to answer for us, but other questions He leaves unanswered. So my job for the rest of our time will not be to answer every question we might have about marriage and divorce, but rather to unpack exactly what God is saying to us about marriage and divorce from this text.

So I urge you as you hear God speak resist the temptation to think about all the other possible questions you have about these topics and receive what God has to say today.

So let's look first at what God has to say about **marrying non-believers** in this text. Look with me at verse 11.

[Read Malachi 2:11]

God starts with an accusation, "Judah – which was another name for God's people – has broken faith." This is that word again: "dealt treacherously", "been faithless" or "broken his promise". And God describes Judah's actions as detestable and desecrating the sanctuary the LORD loves.

This is an incredibly serious accusation! So how had Judah done this?

God says “by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.”

The men of Judah were joining themselves in marriage to women who did not love YHWH like they did. They were the daughters of foreign gods not daughters of the One True God.

And God has a problem with this because the marriage relationship forms a stronger bond between two people than any other relationship. Jesus describes the marriage union saying:

From the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. (Mark 10:7-9)

So marriage is the most humanly powerful way of being united with someone else – but when we unite ourselves this way with an unbeliever we force together too things together that can not join. It’s like trying to mix oil and water. And that is because as Christians, all throughout scripture we are told that we are betrothed to Christ, we are His bride, and we are to be faithful to Him before anyone else.

Just for example Paul told the Corinthian church who were having trouble maintaining their purity:

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

The main point of this passage is that the relationship between us and Christ is like a marriage relationship.

But when we become one flesh with someone who has rejected Jesus as their Lord and Savior we find ourselves precariously uniting a love for Christ with a hatred of Christ. And friends, that does not work.

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Now there are a couple things our passage today is not saying that I would like to clarify. First, our passage is **not** saying “if you find yourself married to a non-believer then get out of that relationship.” This text does not say that.

In fact, the Corinthians had made the mistake of thinking this was what was being called for and, after they became Christians, they began divorcing their non-believing spouses but Paul told them:

If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has

an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. (1 Corinthians 7:12-13)

In other words if you find yourself today married to a non-believer honour this relationship and live out your commitment to Christ from within it.

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The second thing this text is not saying is it is impossible for non-believing spouses to be converted to Christ. We know from personal experience that this happens on occasion. Peter even sets this as the goal of your relationship if you find yourself in this situation. He says:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

So Malachi is not telling us to divorce unbelieving spouses, nor is he denying that they can become Christians. Malachi isn't talking about those situations. But here is what he is talking about: if you are not married yet, if the decision about marriage still lies before you, then Malachi is talking directly into your situation: Do not give yourself in marriage to someone who does not love Jesus like you do.

Because your first marriage is to Christ, honour Him above all. Do not force the Holy Spirit to be united with an unbelieving spouse.

And then verse 12 gives us the warning for anyone who would reject this advice.

[Read Malachi 2:12]

God says when we willfully walk into a relationship with a non-believer, we are in essence saying "my needs for companionship are more important than Your commands God." And we find ourselves asking God to cut us off, to not hear our prayers or accept our sacrifices.

Unmarried brothers and sisters, kids and teenagers this text is talking to you. Don't make this mistake! The world we live in says we can mess around with whoever we want sexually; we can have relationships with whoever we want whenever we want and it won't have any consequences for us.

God says don't mess around with this. We can unite ourselves with God or we can unite ourselves with unbelief to a non-Christian. If you are unmarried today promise yourself and God that you will not marry an unbeliever.

Because God says : **Breaking faith by marrying a non-believer can sever your relationship with God.**

The second temptation this text talks about comes in verses 13 through 16, and it is the temptation to divorce your covenant spouse.

Admittedly these are tricky verses to translate – especially verses 15 and 16 – and if you are reading a more modern version like the ESV you will notice some fairly substantial differences, but I think the NASB which is the standard for literal translations, gets it most accurate when it words verse 16 as saying simply “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD the God of Israel.

When it comes to verses about divorce in the Bible this is probably as direct as it gets. And so what I want to do is look at two reasons from this text why God hates divorce.

First God hates divorce because it is the breaking of a covenant that He was a witness to.

Look with me at verses 13 and 14.

[Read Malachi 2:13-14]

The marriage relationship between two people is not, as our world believes, one that is founded on the feelings of falling in love. People can fall in and out of love quicker than you can go through the drive through at McDonalds.

The foundation of the marriage relationship is the witnessed covenant that exists between two people.

I Daniel, take you, Nicole, to be my wife and I covenant before God and all who are present here to be your loving and faithful husband, as long as we both shall live.

This means that God is the witness of the marriage covenant. He puts His stamp of approval on it. But when we divorce our spouses we tear something up that God has ratified with His signature. And God hates it when His name is dishonoured. That is the first reason from this text that God hates divorce.

The second reason God hates divorce is that the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is a picture of the marriage relationship between God and His people. And when we treat our physical marriages lightly we imply that we treat our marriage to Him lightly as well.

Look at verse 16.

[Read Malachi 2:16]

This is the only time in the book of Malachi where God calls Himself “the God of Israel”. Everywhere else He is called “The LORD Almighty”, but here His title is personal and gives reference to the relationship He has with His chosen people.

This relationship began when God called Abraham to leave the land of his fathers and travel to an unknown place. It grew as God birthed His people from parents who were too old to have children. It was preserved through four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. It was reaffirmed as God rescued His people out of Pharaoh’s grasp and brought them through the Red Sea.

Then it was ratified when God gave the Law and showed His people what it meant to live in a covenant relationship with Him. And then it endured as Israel fluctuated between obedience and disobedience, faithfulness and sin for hundreds of years.

God proved that God was the personal God of Israel. And He is still the God of His chosen people. He is our God.

The prophet Isaiah records God’s intimate promise of faithfulness where these words:

“Do not be afraid... for your Maker is your husband—
 the LORD Almighty is his name—
 the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
 He is called the God of all the earth.
 The LORD will call you back...
 I hid my face from you for a moment,
 but with everlasting kindness
 I will have compassion on you,”
 says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:4-8)

That’s good news for a sinful people – people like us. While we deserve total rejection God is faithful and forgiving and compassionate and long suffering when it comes to His bride.

And the reason He is faithful is because He is in a covenant relationship with us. And He is a covenant keeper. And as His children we image Him and so it is essential that we be covenant keepers too. And this is why **Breaking faith by marrying a non-believer or divorcing your spouse can sever your relationship with God.**

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So where are you at today? I know when a group of Christians like ourselves comes together around a text like this we come from many different places. Some of us have been blessed to be part of unions where both of us love Jesus and want to glorify His name with everything we do. And there is a great

testimony in this church of marriages that have lasted for forty or fifty or more God-glorifying years – that is amazing!

But even those of us who come from histories like this know that we have not escaped sin. While perhaps we have avoided the perils of marrying a non-believing spouse or getting divorced we too have struggled. And that's why we are here.

The reality is that the church is a hospital for sin sick sinners. While the church is infamous for doing it anyway there is no one here worthy to throw the first stone or to look down their nose at the failure of another. All of us are in desperate need of God's underserved mercy no matter who we are married to our how good our marriages look.

But there are others of us here who don't come from a history like that at all. Sin has obviously ravaged your relationships. Some here know the struggle of living with a non-believing spouse – a man or woman who has not pledged to love and serve the Creator of the Universe. And you understand the struggle of attempting to unite the Holy Spirit with unbelief.

And others of us have gone through divorce. Our spouses have divorced us and we have divorced them.

And we have found ourselves hiding in the garden, feeling naked and exposed before a holy God. And we have realized that **Breaking faith by marrying a non-believer or divorcing our spouse can sever our relationship with God.**

But where do we go from here?

Brothers and sisters I want to close by returning to chapter 1 and verse 2. Because nothing God has said in our text today comes outside of the context of His great and unconditional love for us that longs for us to come to Him desperate for salvation and longing to be transformed.

Is that where you are at today?... I leave you with this admonition.

Leave the sin of yesterday behind. It can't be changed and it is covered by the blood of Jesus. Leave it behind. And pledge today and from now on to be a man or woman who keeps faith. If you are not yet married promise yourself and God that you will not marry a non-believing husband or wife; and if you are married pledge to stand with your covenant spouse at any cost. In so doing honour God and keep your relationship with your Creator open.

[Pray]