

Themes in Malachi - Lesson 3

THE TREACHERY OF DIVORCE

Introduction

- A. Text: **Mal. 2:11-16**.
- B. Another evidence of Israel's *irreverence* toward God was their *violation of His will regarding marriage*.
- C. Since God's marriage law is so widely disrespected today, no sin in the OT has any more *immediate interest* for us right now than that of wrongdoing in regard to the marriage relationship.
 - 1. But although it is *relevant* to us, teaching on this subject is no more *popular* than in Malachi's day.
 - 2. Malachi's reference to the "*burden of the word of the Lord*" (**Mal. 1:1**) is appropriate.
- D. The sin of Israel concerning marriage involved not just one kind of wrongdoing, but several.

I. ISRAEL'S VIOLATION OF GOD'S PROHIBITION AGAINST GENTILE MARRIAGES

- A. First, there was the problem of intermarriage with "the daughter[s] of a foreign god" (**Mal. 2:11**).
 - 1. Many, apparently including the priests, were marrying Gentile women, despite the clear prohibition of this in the Law of Moses - **Exo. 34:12-17**; **Deut. 7:1-5**; **1 Kgs. 11:1,2**.
 - 2. Both Ezra (**Ezra 9:1,2**) and Nehemiah (**Neh. 10:30**; **13:23-28**) were greatly distressed at this.
 - 3. Nehemiah said, "I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (**Neh. 13:25**).
- B. Malachi said that "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem" (**Mal. 2:11**).
- C. He said the intermarriages had "profaned the Lord's holy institution which He loves" (**Mal. 2:11**).
 - 1. This meant they had compromised the holiness of God's beloved chosen nation.
 - 2. God was not concerned about a pure physical bloodline, but rather *a pure religious character*.
- D. True to God's original prediction, Israel's *inner holiness* had always been contaminated when they took idolaters for their spouses (e.g. **1 Kgs. 11:1-8**), and so it was in Malachi's day.

II. THE TREACHERY INVOLVED IN UNLAWFUL DIVORCE

- A. Intermarrying with pagans would have been bad enough, but the men of Israel had been *divorcing their original wives in order to marry the idolaters!*
- B. In doing this, the men of Israel were breaking *a covenant to which God Himself was a party*.
 - 1. Malachi says, "She is your companion and your wife *by covenant*" (**Mal. 2:14**).
 - 2. Centuries earlier, Solomon had said that the adulteress "forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets *the covenant of God*" (**Prov. 2:17**).
 - 3. Especially where promises to God are involved, *it is better not to promise than to promise and later break the promise*. Cf. **Eccl. 5:1-7**.
- C. Unlawful divorce is *an act of injustice and violence* perpetrated against one's mate - **Mal. 2:16**.

1. In view of the covenant involved, spouses ought to be able to *rest their complete trust in the other*.
2. When one *betrays* that confidence by unlawful divorce, he commits a *violent act of treachery*.
3. Breaking the marriage vow is a *breaking of trust*, an act of *infidelity* — to God and to one's mate.
4. The deed is all the more treacherous because it harms *one who was led to expect total safety*.
5. An unscriptural divorce is the most *selfish* and *cruel* injury that one person can inflict on another.

III. ANOTHER SERIOUS ASPECT OF UNLAWFUL DIVORCE

- A. As bad as it is, however, the wrong done to one's mate is still not the end of the matter.
- B. Malachi says, "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 good will from your hands" (**Mal. 2:12-14**).
1. The men of Israel couldn't understand why God was not pleased with their sacrifices, but they were fools to think He would accept the "worship" of men doing treachery and violence to their wives.
 2. The wives were weeping for the injustice done to them, and "the tears of these mistreated wives stood as an impenetrable barrier between the worshipers and Jehovah" (Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p. 416).
- C. Unless repentance is forthcoming, broken relationships with other human beings break our relationship with God — and those who contemplate unlawfully divorcing a spouse would do well to consider that it will be *impossible to do so and continue to worship God without repentance*.
1. And what would repentance have required for the men to whom Malachi preached?
 2. **At the very least**, these men could not again be in a worshiping relationship with God until they *severed the wrongful marriages they had entered into* - **Ezra 9:1-10:44**; **Neh. 13:23-27**. Cf. **Ezra 10:2,3,10-12,18,19,44**.
 3. It was not enough for them to be sorry that they had entered into marriages that were not right — God demanded that these marriages be *dissolved*, and the worship of these men would be rejected by God until that took place.
 4. **But not only that**, these men would have had to truly *repent* of the *sin* of unlawfully divorcing their wives to start with, even if they had not remarried!
 5. As with any other sin, repenting of a wrongful divorce would include:
 - a. Godly sorrow — as opposed to mere worldly sorrow - **2 Cor. 7:10**.
 - b. Confession — a full, no-excuses acknowledgment of the *sinfulness* of the act - **Mt. 19:6**.
 - c. Asking God's forgiveness.
 - d. Apologies, asking the forgiveness of others — ex-spouse, relatives, local church, etc.
 - e. Clearing of one's self in every way possible - **2 Cor. 7:11**.
 - f. Commitment to change — so as never again to repeat the sin again.
- D. God will not be insulted by the "worship" of those who wrong others and won't repent - **Mt. 5:23,24**.
- E. *Injustice toward the creature* stems from *irreverence toward the Creator* — and God rejects the worship of those who don't fear Him enough to treat other people rightly, including their spouses - **1 Pt. 3:7**. Cf. **Eph. 5:21**.

Conclusion

- A. Marriage cannot succeed without a high level of *commitment*.
- B. God has said *not to divorce* one's mate.
1. In Jesus' words, "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (**Mt. 19:6**).
 2. *Only one scriptural exception to this is given* - **Mt. 19:9**.
 3. Who is bold enough to add *other reasons* and say that one may do *what God said not to do*?

- C. Malachi's words are as clear as they are strong: "The Lord God of Israel says that He *hates divorce*, for it covers one's garment with *violence*" (**Mal. 2:16**).
- D. It is not without good reason that he added, "Take heed to your spirit, that you *do not deal treacherously*" (**Mal. 2:16**).
- E. It is all too obvious that Malachi's teaching on divorce is needed today.
1. Whether we have the commitment needed for marriage is largely determined by *our view of divorce*: **the circumstances under which we think divorce might be an option.**
 2. We need to accept the fact — and teach our young — that the Lord allowed only one reason for divorce (**Mt. 19:9**), and that **divorce not an option under any other circumstance.**
 3. Congregations need to hold the line and take a *disciplinary stand* when members violate the permanency of the marriage vows and refuse to repent of the sins involved.
- F. If we would take seriously the teaching of God's word that marriage is *a permanent, inviolable relationship*, we would have far fewer problems than we do at present - **Psa. 34:8**.