

Malachi 2 • Fallen Leaders, Rampant Divorce, and Bad Attitudes

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All right let's get into some scripture tonight. This, I think you're going to find this to be a very important study tonight. We're in Malachi, so open your Bible please to Malachi chapter two. And I, this isn't a terribly long chapter, but I got to tell you, while I was studying this chapter out I just, I felt like the LORD just kept kind of opening the door of my heart and mind to this, to what He was saying here, and I'm just hoping and praying that I can get through it all tonight. So we better, let's pray. Should we? We could do that.

Father, thank You for allowing us to come together as the body of Christ. It is always so delightful to get together with Your people and to worship together, to open our hearts to Your presence and to the ministry of Your Word, LORD, because this is where You get to talk to us.

And I pray, Father, that You give us ears to hear tonight; to hear Your voice. To hear the exhortations of Your Word, the wisdom and the insight, and the grace, LORD, that You desire to speak into our hearts tonight. Let it, let it really just saturate our hearts to the point where we see very clearly how to put it into practice. We ask You to be with us, Father. In Jesus' precious and holy Name. Amen. Amen.

You might remember when we left off last week, God was confronting the priesthood; the priests, the leaders of Israel in the end of the first chapter. And so the first nine verses of chapter two really kind of continue that conversation.

For that reason, I— you know, they probably should have been part of chapter one because He talks to them here about their lack of reverence to His Word and the commands that He had given originally to the tribe of Levi. Remember something about Israel. Okay? It was the tribe of Levi whom God had set apart to function as priests, and then it, within the tribe of Levi, it was the tribe of Aaron, the brother of Moses, that was set apart to be high priests and only the sons of Aaron could be high priests.

The other Levites had a priestly function to come alongside the High Priest, and there were many functions that they had, and those functions even morphed a

little bit over the years. But ah, He's (God) going to talk to them in this first part of chapter two about how they as leaders had begun to— pull away from their devotion to the Word of God. And then the second section that we're going to be looking at in this chapter appears to be addressed to the general populace of the people of Israel, and therefore it's going to be addressed very much to you and me as well.

But it concerns the alarming rate of divorce that was going on in Israel at that time. And so God is going to confront the people related to that. And that will take up verses 10 through 16. And then in the last verse of the chapter is its own section, which is interesting to think of one verse being an entire section, but it really is a departure from the other two.

And in that final verse, the LORD is just simply going to speak to the people about their “tude” (attitude). Isn't that what the cool people say today? “Don't get a “tude” with me, man.” That's, that's short for attitude. I, my kids had to tell me that. Because I'm not in the cool group; haven't been for many years. In fact, I don't know if I ever was— that's another thing altogether.

But they, the people of Israel, were copping an attitude about God, frankly. And God is going to address it— in the last verse of the chapter. So let's get into it. The first— I'm just going to read the first nine verses because this is the first section. He says,

“¹ And now, O priests, this command is for you. ² If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. ³ Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. ⁴ So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. ⁵ My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. ⁶ True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. ⁷ For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. ⁸ But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, ⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.” (ESV)

Now, this is the word that He's giving to the priests. This is what, this is the heart of God toward leaders. Okay? Leaders of His people. So you might be thinking, well, how does this apply to me?

I don't live in the ancient nation of Israel. I don't live under the Mosaic Covenant. I don't live under a Levitical or even Aaronical (Aaronic) priesthood for that matter. I don't live under those things. So how does this apply to me? This is the heart of God toward leaders. Okay? And we still have leaders of God's people today, and we know how God feels about it because He expresses His heart.

And God had originally made a covenant with the tribe of Levi, as I said, that all their males would be His priests, and again, those descended from Aaron were high priests. But the LORD speaks in this section about His intentions for that calling. In other words, why He called these men into these roles of leadership that He gave to the sons of Levi.

And it's in verse five; look with me again in your Bible. He says, "*My covenant with him was one of life and peace.*" That was His intention. "*My covenant with Levi,*" in other words. "The role that I gave you," He's saying to these men, "is a role of life. And it's one of peace, but you've turned it into something else; you've corrupted it because you didn't hold to the way." And we'll talk about what that means, and it became something else.

Now you'll notice He says, "*My covenant with Levi.*" Don't get weirded out when He uses the word 'covenant' here. Don't think that He made a special covenant that was different from the covenant He made through Moses (or the Mosaic covenant).

The word 'covenant' here simply refers to an agreement made with an individual— and in this case, the descendants of Levi, outlining their service. And that's why He says, "I made this covenant with Levi." And that means the sons of Levi. And again, He calls it a covenant of life and peace. And that's kind of interesting because you know, you think, "Well, what did the priests do that was so full of life and peace?"

We tend to think of the priests of Israel as being involved only in animal sacrifices. It's like, didn't they always just have the... weren't they just always up to their elbows in blood? And doing all those ki—, and doing all the other things that went like, and there was all these other duties and lighting incense and you know, putting fresh bread on the table.

They had to do stuff to kind of keep up the temple and that sort of thing. But, you know, back when Moses spoke a blessing over the sons of Levi in the book of Deuteronomy, here's what he said. Let me put this up on the screen. From Deuteronomy chapter 33, he (Moses) said:

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Deuteronomy 33:9-10 (ESV)

"...they observed your word and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law;"

And he's talking about the priests. You see, they were involved in more than just animal sacrifices. They were teaching. They were instructing the people of God in the way of the LORD. And this was apparently an issue that had repeated itself.

You know, what He (God) goes on to say– look at verse seven (Malachi). Go back here in your text. He says, *"For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should seek instruction (construction) from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."* Notice that. The priest is called the messenger.

Of the LORD of hosts. Do we have messengers today of the LORD? Well, yeah. I mean, I'm kind of doing it right now. And there are evangelists and there are other functional people that are just ministering the Word of God. They become messengers of the LORD. But there were times in Israel's history when they were without those messengers. Look at, on the screen, look at 2 Chronicles, chapter 15, it says:

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2 Chronicles 15:3 (ESV)

"For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law..."

Did you check that out? A teaching priest. So we can plainly see that God intended the priest to do more than just sacrifice animals and keep incense burning and that sort of thing.

Now look again with me at verse two (Malachi), where we get an idea of why the priests were getting a rebuke from the LORD. Look at verse two again. It

says, *"If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart."* So the first thing He says is, they're not listening. They're not listening. They stopped listening.

Can you imagine leaders who stopped listening to the LORD? Leaders who stopped listening? Not only did that, they stopped listening, but what they knew of the Word of God, they were no longer taking it to heart. So that's the second thing. He says, *"If you will not take it to heart..."* And then lastly, He says, and if you will not, *"give honor to My name."* So they were not properly honoring the Name of the LORD.

Now "the Name of the LORD," is an interesting Biblical phrase. Jesus used it. He talked about those who believe in My Name and the name was everything about a person— in this case, God. So "the Name of the LORD" means literally all that is true about the LORD. They were beginning to compromise what was true about God.

They were saying things about God that weren't true. Have you heard of any of that going on today? Are pastors or leaders anywhere in the world saying things that are no longer true about God? In fact, they're unbiblical. Yeah. That is happening today, too. And it was happening in Israel and God is calling them on it.

And of course all this underscores, you know, just the tremendous responsibility of those who represent the LORD. I can't imagine somebody going into the ministry as a business. I just— I can't. I just can't imagine it. And I know that a lot of people have, and over the years many, many people have. It's a career. Some of them didn't even know the LORD, but went into the ministry, you know? That's a scary thought.

But you know, the apostle Paul spoke of maintaining his own sense of connectedness to his calling and the Word of God and all those things. He wrote about this in his first letter to the Corinthians, let me show you this on the screen. He (Paul) said:

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1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (ESV)

"So I do not run aimlessly: I do not box," (you know) *"as one beating the air."*

(He says, "What I actually do— is I've had to learn to) *"discipline my body"* (and that means I've learned to say no to my physical, carnal appetites) *"and keep*

them under control,” (Look what he says here at the end of his passage) “lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

We all know of pastors and leaders, who after teaching and preaching, have they themselves become disqualified. And that's what Paul said. He says, “I, this is a constant issue in my life, I have to maintain this control over my fleshly body.” So that— do you know why? Do you know why he said that?

Listen, people, if you give into your fleshly appetites over and over and over again, pretty soon they dominate you. You have to, at some point in time, say, “No. No. I'm in charge. Not my body. My body is not going to dictate my life.” And that means my passions, you know? One of the reasons Paul said what he said is that he knew— as a representative of the LORD, there was a stricter standard. You guys do know, right, that there's less grace for leaders? And that may shock you, but it's true. Look at what James says. Look at this on the screen. James 3:1. He says:

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James 3:1 (ESV)

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers (That's people who speak for God, teach the word of God), for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

What's that mean? It means there's the higher standard. I have to tell you, this verse has kept me up a few nights just thinking about it. But that's what it means to fear God. That is the definition. And that is what the priests weren't doing. They no longer feared God; to honor His Name. And you know, speaking of leaders, you know when Paul was writing to Timothy concerning elders who refuse to get their lives in order as it relates to sin. You remember what he said? Let me show you on the screen 1 Timothy chapter five, he says:

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1 Timothy 5:20 (ESV)

“As for those (elders) who persist in sin (in other words, they've been rebuked and they won't stop. He says you need to eventually go to the point where you) rebuke them in the presence of all, (everybody, he means in front of the whole church) so that the rest may stand in fear.”

That's not a fun passage to preach on by the way. But the reason I'm sharing it with you is because it's important to understand there's a higher standard for

leaders. We don't go in front of the whole body when Joe Anybody, you know, falls into sin and whatever. You know? We don't make a mockery of them and stand up in front of everybody and humiliate them.

They're not representatives, they're not people who are literally representing the LORD to the whole body of Christ. They're not people who have stood up in front of the body and said, "I'm a leader." You know? But when leaders fall in that area, in that way, Paul says to Timothy, listen, "They're going to be an example in Godliness and they're going to be an example in ungodliness."

And one is a positive example, and one is a negative example, but either way they're going to be an example to the flock. And if that sounds harsh to you, that's because it is. It is harsh. But you know, God has always taken very seriously those who represent Him.

Do you remember when Moses got angry with the people when God wasn't angry? God told him to speak to the rock so that water would come gushing out of it and take care of the people of Israel. This was almost at the end of their 40-year journey, and Moses had just had it. He just was fed up. These people were a bunch of grumbling babies, and he was tired and he had it up to here. (raises hand above his head)

And so the LORD said, "Speak to the rock and I'll take care of it; I'll bring water." And Moses got angry and he struck the rock. And water, you know, God graciously allowed water to come out and took care of the whole people. But you'll remember Moses couldn't go into the Promised Land because of that. He (God) says, "You didn't represent Me, Moses. I wasn't angry. You were angry."

See, representing the LORD is serious business. You represent the LORD to the world. You might even represent to the body of Christ in some capacity, but also to the world. There's an old saying it's not Biblical, but I think it's true that you may be the only Bible that somebody ever reads.

I mean, I think there's some truth in that statement in the sense that you represent what it is to be a Believer. And that's an important representation. And it's important to see here in the Word that God takes it seriously that we might honor His Name. Now it's in verses eight and nine where the LORD describes the fallout from their lack of devotion.

He says in verse eight, "*But you have turned aside from the LORD* (or from the Way rather, and the Way refers to the way God intended for the priests to

function in Israel, to be a blessing to the people. He says), “*you have turned aside from the way.*” And as a result, He goes on to say, “*You have caused many to stumble by your instruction.*”

Do people stumble today because of the poor instruction of some pastors and leaders and people who say that they're teachers? Absolutely. All the time. All the time. Does God take it seriously? Yes He does. Because you see— and the reason God took it seriously with Israel is because the priests were put in that place to keep people from stumbling.

And somebody who's genuinely called to the ministry, to minister the Word of God is put there to help, to keep people from stumbling. But when they become the cause of that stumbling, who's going to keep them (the people) from stumbling? You know? That's a serious matter. It's the same like when our— when a police force becomes corrupt, they're the ones who are supposed to keep the law.

What happens when those who keep the law become lawless? There's no one to protect the people from lawlessness anymore. Well, that's the way it was in Israel. The priests were there to protect— and they were the offending party. And that's a serious matter in God's sight. Now furthermore, He goes on to say in that verse, “*You’ve corrupted the covenant of Levi.*”

And the Hebrew word corrupted— I looked it up in my Hebrew dictionary and it means ‘to go to ruin.’ It's kind of like leaving something out, like food till it rots you. “You corrupted this beautiful covenant that I made with the sons of Levi to love, protect the people and speak life into their hearts and minds,” (God said).

And this is entirely contrary, you know, to the heart of God. Notice He says at the last portion of verse nine— says, He accuses the priests of showing partiality in their instruction. Why is He? Why is He, God, worried about them showing partiality? Let me show you Romans 2:11 on the screen. Here's why...

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Romans 2:11 (ESV)

“For God shows no partiality.”

That's why. He wants us to represent His heart. You see that? God wants you and me to represent His heart, and His heart is impartial.

And so as leaders in the body of Christ or people representing the LORD, we are not to show partiality and the priests we're doing just that. You might remember Paul wrote to Timothy and said something very similar. Look at this on the screen from 1 Timothy 5; it says:

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1 Timothy 5 (ESV)

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.”

Paul was keeping with the heart of God in exhorting Timothy in keeping with the heart of God.

And finally, God outlined in this passage how He would respond to their unfaithfulness. Look at verse two. Go back to verse two. It says, *“I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.”* In fact, He says, “I’ve already done it.” What does He mean by that? Well, there were special blessings.

Listen, people. There's special blessings for all areas of ministry. When God calls you into ministry, I don't care what it is, even if it's reaching the people you work with, it's raising Godly children, being a good wife or a good husband, that, if that's your ministry, that's your ministry. And listen, there's blessings.

God gives blessings for every calling that He places upon people's lives, every calling. But when we fail to carry out that ministry, God says, “I can't bless that.” In fact, He says, “I’ve already withheld my blessings from you because you're not functioning in the way that would bring about the blessing.”

So now you're reaping a curse rather than a blessing. What a terrible thing, you know? And then in verse three, the LORD said— look with me there, verse three: *“Behold,”* He says, *“I will rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces and the dung of your offerings.”* And He says, *“...and you shall be taken away with it.”* It's like, wow okay— let's get graphic here. This is translated actually differently in some Bibles.

Let me explain what's going on. When they sacrificed, when they would, when the priest would prepare sacrifices for the altar there were certain parts of the animal that were considered unclean and they would carry those off... and including, like you know, the bladder and things like that. There were things

that were just not intended to be burnt on the altar, and those parts are referred to as 'awful.'

But it's spelled o-f-f-a-l. Offal. I'm sure it was awful, a-w-f-u-l. But this is spelled differently. It's pronounced exactly the same, but it literally was the entrails of the animal and certain organs and things that were again, not intended to be given as a burnt offering to the LORD. They were carried off to a place where they would be disposed of properly.

Here's what God is saying, "I'm going to take that which is unclean. And I'm going to smear it on your faces, and you're going to be carried off with the offal— with that which is thrown out." So this is a pretty serious statement that the LORD is making to the priests.

And then lastly, in verse nine, you'll notice that the LORD says, "*so I will make you despised and abased before all the people.*" And the LORD promises here that whatever honor or respect that they would've otherwise received from the people, He will in fact, cause them to be despised. And the word 'abased' means brought low, humbled.

(God is saying) "I'm going to humble you. You refuse to humble yourself and to honor Me, and so I'm going to humble you before the people." All right. It's a strong word to leaders, isn't it? And leaders today need to take all these things into consideration from the standpoint of representing the LORD.

Now we come to the next section of chapter two, which is verses 10 through 16. And whereas the first section really of Malachi, up to this point, really deals with the way the people were responding to and treating God. This is more or less how they're treating one another, as we deal with this next section. And here God is going to confront the people regarding their lack of respect and honor toward marriage.

They aren't honoring the LORD, the priests aren't honoring the LORD, and the people aren't honoring the institution of marriage. And by the way, when we don't honor the institution of marriage, we don't honor the LORD. Because He came up with the idea; we didn't. It's His institution and we have to remember that. And what that means because there are implications connected with it being in His institution.

Since marriage is His institution, that means it's not ours to mess with— or redefine, or change or alter— in any way. We didn't come up with it; we're not to mess with it. It is not given into the hands of man to change the terms of

marriage. And God made those terms abundantly clear. But anyway, we need to get into this because this is a confrontation to the people regarding marriage. And I'm just going to read this section through like I did the other verses; this 10 through 16. It goes like this:

“¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning, the covenant of our fathers? ¹¹ Judah has been faithless, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob, any descendants of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts.”

“¹³ And this second thing you do, you cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.”

“¹⁶ ‘For the man who does not love his wife, but divorces her,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘covers his garment with violence,’ says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” (ESV)

By the way, those last few words there “...do not be faithless,” that's the theme. Of this entire section. You know it's funny, we don't act often, hear the word ‘faithless’ when it comes to our connection with divorce today. And yet in just seven verses, I don't know if you were counting, but He (God) used the word faithless five times. Five times— as He's talking to them about divorce.

We don't use faithless because that's kind of a bummer word. We use, you know, words like incompatible and irreconcilable and stuff like that. But not faithless.

In fact, we've become, you know, downright jaded about marriage when it comes to some people getting married, particularly like celebrities, you know. Do you ever see that in the news? So-and-so got married to So-and-so, and we're kind of like, “Yeah right. I wonder how long that'll last. I'll give them three years. Maybe two.”

You know, you look at the biographical information of people, you know celebrities, and we see they've been married five times and stuff like that. Well, it's become commonplace in our culture, and it was becoming commonplace in Israel at the time of Malachi, and He (God) called it faithlessness.

And that's kind of a smack in the face. In verse 10, God accuses them of being faithless toward one another. In verse 11, He confronts them with their faithfulness toward the sanctuary of the LORD, in that some of them were actually marrying daughters of pagans— and then coming into sacrifice to the LORD like nothing was wrong. You know?

They were marrying unbelievers. They were bringing that pagan influence into their family unit. God loves the family unit. He wants us to protect the family unit, and yet they were bringing in these pagan women into their marriages. And God noticed, and then in verses, you know, in verse 13 and following, God reveals to them why their offerings are no longer being accepted by Him.

In fact, He acknowledges their tears. You'll notice in that verse, He says, "...and you flood My altar with tears. You weep and wail and groan, and make all kinds of noises because you know that I'm no longer receiving your offerings. I'm not accepting them."

And the people were just completely unaware of how to account... for this lack of acceptance by the LORD. It's like, "What's the deal? We don't get it. The LORD isn't accepting our offerings anymore. What's the problem?" But in verse 14, God reveals the reason for His disapproval and His distance.

Look at verse 14. He says, "*Because,*" and this is important, "*the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife...*" Notice these words. I would think you might even want to underline them or circle them, "*by covenant.*" Those are important words. Okay? In fact, there's a couple of important things here, but the NIV I think, makes this— I, there are sometimes the NIV makes versus clearer, and this is one of them. Let me show you this on the screen. In the NIV, it says:

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Malachi 2:14 (NIV84)

"You ask, "*Why?*" Why are you not accepting our offer? "*It is because 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."

I want you to notice those words '*acting as the witness.*' Did you see those? "...*acting as the witness...*" What was the responsibility of witnesses in cases where a covenant was being made between two parties, because you know, everything had to get witnessed. They didn't have a clerk of court back then. If you're going to sell something to somebody, there was no paper receipts or a clerk of court where you file and say, "I've sold this land to you know, my neighbor, or I've sold this, my herd of cattle, to this person."

They would make all of those bargains, all those covenants, all of those agreements in front of witnesses. Witnesses witnessed everything. That's what happened at the city gate of every city. There would be the elders of the city who would witness. And it's kind of a cool job when you think about it because the elders were elderly and they probably couldn't work hard like they, you know, used to in their younger years.

But they were still very useful in their older years. They would go and sit in the city gate, and they would be witness to the various transactions, businesses, and covenants that were going on within the life of the community. Now here is what God is saying. He's saying, "I'm acting as the witness." The witness of what? "Your marriage union."

(God speaking) "I'm acting as the witness. I am now fulfilling that role." Well, what is the role of the witness? The witness is to remind the parties of the terms of the agreement should there ever become a question of uncertainty or possibly unfaithfulness. Right?

Somebody comes along later and says, "Wait a minute, we agreed that he was going to pay me this much for the money, for the land rather. He was going to pay me this much and I only got this much."

And the witnesses rise up and they go, "No, no, no, no. We were there. We heard the agreement. He paid you the exact amount. We actually saw the money change hands. We were there." That's what witnesses did. Now think about this as it relates to marriage.

God says, "You weep and you wail because I no longer accept your offerings." And you say, "Why in the world, don't You?" Well, I'll tell you why; I'm acting as the witness, and what I am telling you is, I was there. I heard the promises

you made to one another when you made a covenant, and this is a breach of those promises.” (leans forward) That's what a witness is supposed to do.

You know, I kind of wonder sometimes what would happen today if people who were witnesses... and usually the witnesses are the best man and the maid or matron of honor. Not always, but most of the time— that's just our tradition. I often wonder what would happen if those witnesses rose up to confront couples who are in the throes of divorce and just simply say, “I was there. I heard your promises. And this isn't what you promised.” I mean, I wonder— because that's what witnesses are supposed to do.

Here's a little bit of a side point. But I think it's an important thing to discuss. I get a lot of questions (you might wonder) about marriage— or not wonder. Let me— here's a couple and they're really kind of the same thing. But the question is:

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What defines biblical marriage?

What constitutes being married in the eyes of the LORD?

What would you say if somebody said that? Don't speak out, of course. I'm just asking you kind of, but I get this a lot. What constitutes? You know, “What, what makes us married in the eyes of the LORD? And interestingly enough, most people would say, “Well, you need to be married by a pastor.” (counting on his fingers)

Some people would even say, “You have to be married in a church.” Or you know, if you're married by a pastor, married by a priest... depending on where they come from or their background.

And then others would say, “Well, you got to have a marriage license.” Do you know the Bible says nothing about those things? Do you know the Bible says nothing about a pastor marrying anybody?

I am off the hook. I've actually done a lot of weddings, but not because the Bible demanded it. It's just because that's— it's our tradition and they wanted me to help them say their vows. And I consider it part of my pastoral privilege, you know, to do that. It's a delight to do that. But the Bible doesn't tell me I have to do it. In fact you know, here's what's interesting: there are no passages in the Bible giving any specific direction on how to get married. None.

So when people ask me the question, “What constitutes a biblical marriage?” or “What constitutes a marriage that is approved in the eyes of God?” we have to go back and we have to say, “Well, it's not about doing it the proper way.”

That's what people get caught up in. Got to do this in a church, by a pastor or a priest; do this, say this, get a license. We come up with all these things we have to do that make it “proper.” God isn't concerned as much about with proper as He is about attitude. What's in here. (taps heart) That's what God cares about the most, and that is why He uses the word ‘faithless’ to describe what was going on in Israel at that time.

He didn't talk about the specifics of their— the way they did things. He just said, “In your heart, you have become faithless, and it has now expressed itself in your marriages.” You see, it comes down to a heart attitude. It's not an issue of doing the right thing the right way.

And so you say, “Well, what does the Bible say? I mean, what, how do, and then how do we know? Do I just walk up to a gal and say, ‘Hey You. (pointing) We're married.’” (laughs) You know?

Well interestingly enough, this passage right here in Malachi gives us some insights into God's intention for marriage and what He expects. Look again with me at verse 14: He (God) says, “*But you say, ‘Why does He not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless. Though she is your companion...*” and here's that part I wanted you to underline or circle, “*... your wife by covenant.*”

Here's the important thing: God considers when a man and a woman come together in marriage, that they are making a covenant with one another and before God. That's an important, that's the important realization. That it— that we enter into a covenant with an individual by marriage. And you'll notice that God's talks about how He rises up as the witness, because remember, witnesses were in everything back in those days, and they had a very important role.

And I believe that's another important thing about marriage is that it shouldn't be done in a closet. There should be witnesses. Doesn't have to be many. Could be just two or three people that were there and witness to your vows, you know. It doesn't have to be a crowd of people, doesn't have to be 400. I mean, it's fine if you have a wedding with 400 people, great. But there just needs to be witnesses, right? We don't do these things in secret. And this is what we see. You know? And these are at least interesting ideas to help us understand what defines a marriage ceremony that honors the LORD.

But frankly, one of the other passages in the Bible that gives us wonderful insights is a single verse in the Bible and it's in Genesis. Let me show you this on the screen. Chapter two verse 24.

(slide)

Genesis 2:24 (ESV)

“Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

And this is interesting because in the single verse, you see three things. First of all, that this man shall leave his father and mother. This does not... listen, again this is attitude. When it says ‘a man shall leave his father and mother’ what it means is, he shall come out from under his mother and father's authority and family structure. And when he takes this woman as his bride, they will become a new family unit. That's what it means. It doesn't mean he has to move away. Do you know that the Jews, many times they would when a son would get married, they'd build an addition onto the house for the son and his wife. But he still had to leave his father and mother.

I have known some men who move miles and miles and miles away from his parents, but never leave. You know what I mean? And I know some guys who can live on their parents' property and they can leave— and understand, “ My wife and I are a new family structure. We have come out of our parents’ family structure and now we stand on our own.” So that's the first thing. A man must leave his father or mother. That's an important statement regarding marriage.

But notice He (God) goes on to say that he (the man) must hold fast to his wife, and that means faithfulness. It's the opposite of what God was confronting the people of Israel with, with their faithless attitude toward marriage. He says, a man must hold fast to his wife. That is a marriage that God honors and that honors marriage and God.

And then finally He (God) says, *“The two shall become one flesh.”* And this is where the couple together understand their unique union that exists between them. Do you know what's interesting? It's interesting. I find it interesting anyway, that the woman to whom I am married, with whom I share no DNA, is one flesh with me. And I have children who I share DNA with. I mean, good grief, the poor kids look like me— but God doesn't call that one flesh. You know? Isn't that crazy? This woman who I took in marriage, He says, “You are one flesh with her.” to understand that and to honor that.

And then we get into the whole New Testament picture of how it is this beautiful idea of Christ and His relationship to His bride. It just— and He says, “I want you to honor that. I want you to honor that.” And you know, Jesus affirmed that whole revelation regarding marriage. Let me show you on the screen, Matthew 19.

(slide)

Matthew 19:3-6 (ESV)

“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’” By the way, they— in some cases, Jews could divorce their wives for like, burning dinner, or if he just didn’t like her anymore; if he just didn’t think she looked good one morning. It’s like you’re—he’d write her a certificate of divorce, hand it to her in the presence of two or three witnesses, and she’s gone.

“He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”

Yeah. See that? That’s Jesus putting His rubber stamp on what we read earlier in Genesis chapter two. And this is and this is what God is now saying here in Malachi. Look again with me in verse 15. We talk about them being made one flesh. Look at verse 15. It says, *“Did he not make them one?”* See, that’s what happens in a marriage, when God oversees a marriage, He says, *“Did He not make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union?”*

And then He reveals why it was such a big deal to make them one. He says, *“What was the one God seeking? Here’s the answer, “Godly offspring.”* Why did God want you— why does He want you to protect your marriage union? Because He’s looking for Godly kids. Here’s the thing we have to understand, God created the home okay— to be a home with a dad and a mom, who are committed to one another, as the ideal environment for raising Godly offspring.

Now, let me stop here and just say— I’m not saying and God is not saying either, that first of all, a home with two parents is a guaranteed place where kids are going to be Godly. It’s not a guarantee; it’s just the best environment. That’s what He’s saying. It’s the ideal environment. It’s the best environment God can come up with. We’re still sinners and we’re still flawed.

Neither is He saying that a single parent can't possibly have Godly children. He's not saying that either, because that's very possible. I have seen single parents do an absolutely incredible job of raising their kids and raising Godly kids. So God isn't saying that that's you know, an impossibility, or that being married is a guarantee. He's simply saying that this is what He has created to be the best environment for those children to flourish in a Godly home. Okay?

Verse 16 is important. He (God) says, *“For the man who does not love his wife, but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.”*

All right, stop there. In order to understand what He's saying here in verse 16, you have to know that part of the Jewish marriage ceremony involved a husband symbolically covering his wife. He would take his garment and he would cover her. He would wrap it around her during the marriage ceremony, and that was a picture of him extending his protection to his wife. And it was a beautiful picture. And frankly it's one that we see played out in the Book of Ruth.

You'll remember that when Ruth went to the threshing floor and laid down you know, next to Boaz, she took his garment in a very bold action and covered her herself a little bit with it, so that his feet were uncovered. And she was essentially saying to him you know, ‘spread your garment over me.’ In fact, she kind of says that, “I want you to, I want you as my kinsman redeemer to spread your garment over me and be my protection and take me you know, as your wife,” and that sort of thing.

But here in Malachi, because of the rampant divorce that was going on, the LORD speaks of covering his garment with violence, which is an interesting way of saying it, but He's saying— what He's saying is when you cast off your wife, you are doing violence in the sense that she is your one flesh partner and when you do violence to the marriage, you do violence to yourself.

And that's what He's saying. He (the man) covers his own garment with violence. You see, he's not just, he's not just doing this to her, he's doing it to himself or vice-versa. But there is a, there is a— man taking on violence toward himself. That's an important thing to remember. You can't, you can't hurt your spouse, when you're in a one flesh relationship you can't hurt your spouse without hurting yourself.

I should probably just kind of, you know, end this section here by saying, you know I know that some of you have gone through the heartache of divorce and the pain firsthand. You know it up close and personal, and you know how devastating it is. And if you could change it, you would've.

But here you sit and you've got that experiential history in your life. And I just want you to know God loves you and He can use that in your life to encourage others. He can use your past so that you can speak words of grace and wisdom into the lives and hearts of others and help them you know, and be a blessing to them. And I want you to know that if you've been through that in your life, you're not a second-class citizen around here, because we've all been through lots of junk that we're not proud of. But you know what? We move on with the LORD, don't we?

Okay, the final verse of the chapter says, verse 17, “*‘You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD and he delights in them.’ Or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’*”

Let me explain what's going on here. The people were so discouraged and despondent about seeing wicked people seemingly prosper that they were literally starting to believe, and although they were saying it probably sarcastically, they were starting to believe that the God of justice was no longer operational in the universe, you know. And they're saying things, they're saying— well, this is how we would probably say it today, “Well, I guess people get a pass now. Doesn't matter how evil you are or what kind of stuff you're doing today, I guess God's just not noticing these days. He's just letting people get by with it.”

That's the essence of what they were saying, to the point where they were saying, “Where is the God of justice? Because I sure don't see it. I don't see God exercising justice in the world today.” And so they were grumbling and their grumbling was wearying the LORD. Isn't that funny? You can weary the LORD. Now I know that's an anthropomorphism. And then that word means it's a— it's something we use to describe God in ways that really don't describe God, because God can't be wearied in this— in the physical sense of becoming weary.

God doesn't get weary. So we use anthropomorphisms to help us understand that He's just— it bugs Him when people grumble. When His people grumble and lose faith and, and when.... But how does that happen, you guys? It's important we see this— because you want to stay away from this too. Just— it

happens when we get our eyes fixated on our circumstances all around us, or we start looking at the world. It's one of the reasons I stopped watching the news.

We get our eyes fixated on our world, and pretty soon we're depressed. We're discouraged. And we're, and we're starting to do, say the things that they– “Well I guess right is wrong and wrong is right, and there's nothing we can do about it. And we're– and God sure isn't doing anything about it.” And pretty soon you start to walk in unbelief instead of faith. And it becomes this grumbling thing.

And you know, we don't have time to get into it by any stretch, but there's a wonderful Psalm, which I love teaching through, Psalm 73 if you want to take a note, where the psalmist literally did that. He got his eyes off the LORD. He was focused on wicked people who appeared very much to be prospering. And he got really bummed out about it. I mean, really bummed out, to the point where he was like, “Why am I trying to walk with the LORD again? Remind me here. Why? Because it doesn't seem to be doing me any good; I'm struggling. I got physical problems. My neighbor over there who's tan and sleek and has a lovely California wife and a boat in the driveway, and two properties and a three-car garage– he's doing great and he doesn't care a snit about the LORD. So tell me again why I read my Bible every day and pray and go to church.”

That's what– Psalm 73 doesn't mention the California wife or anything like the boat or the three-car garage, but you get it. I'm putting it in our modern vernacular. The point is, the Psalmist got to the point of, he's– of saying, I let this attitude kind of overtake me, and I literally became like a brute beast in front of the LORD.

Do you know what made the difference? It's when he lifted his eyes to heaven. And that's what he goes on in that Psalm to say, he says, “...then I came into the sanctuary of God.” And that's a way of saying, “I came into God's presence. Then I got it. Then I realized... oh, I see what I've been doing. I've been focused on this life, this world.”

Guys, do you understand this world is under the temporary control of Satan? If you're going to sit and focus on this world, you're going to be depressed. Why do you think so many unbelievers are struggling with depression and suicide?

They got nowhere to turn. You have the hope of Christ. You have hope. They don't. It's depressing to fixate on this life, and that is exactly why the Apostle Paul exhorts us all in the book of Colossians; we'll end with this, Colossians chapter three on the screen.

(slide)

Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” And he goes on even to say, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Because this earth, you guys, is passing away. It is corrupted and it's passing away. So don't focus here. Don't focus on this life. This ain't going to do it for you. This is just going to get you big time depressed. Set your minds on things above. Let's pray.

Father, I thank You so much for every time that we get to spend in your Word. Truly delightful LORD, to hear You speak because Your word is Truth. And LORD, we long for Truth. We live in a world that is full of lies and half-truths, an outright deception.

And LORD, it's such a delight to just sit in Your presence and hear Your word. It just washes over us. LORD, it challenges us. It feeds us. It energizes us. We need it so much. Thank You, LORD.

Thank You for loving us despite all of our faults. Thank You for loving us, LORD, even when we get caught up in a corrupted world.

Thank You, LORD, for loving us, even when our marriages don't last the test of— make the test of time. Thank You for loving us.

LORD, we have scars, many of us. We have scars – not only of our own past mistakes, but the mistakes of others that have been visited upon us. But we know, that in Christ, our past life and all those mistakes are under the blood of the Lamb. And we all start fresh living for Jesus, putting our hope in You, living our life to please You and not ourselves.

Thank You, Father. Continue to be with us. We pray, for we ask it in the Name of Jesus, our Savior and our King. And all God's people said together, “Amen.”

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Wednesday.