

Main Idea: In Malachi 2:10-16, the Lord of hosts delivers a message to families through His servant Malachi. He reveals that there are two priorities (two covenant relationships) which He expects us to value.

I. Value the people of God (10-12).

- A. God has placed us in a covenant relationship with Himself and each other.
- B. God is not pleased when we devalue this covenant.
 - 1. It happens when we take advantage of fellow covenant members (10).
 - 2. It happens when we enter mixed marriages (11).
- C. The Lord identifies the consequences of violating this covenant (12).
 - 1. There are spiritual consequences.
 - 2. There are social consequences.

II. Value the partner God gives us (13-16).

- A. What does the Lord think about a person who weeps at the altar (13)?
- B. What does the Lord think about marriage (14-15)?
 - 1. Your marriage is a covenant (14).
 - 2. Your spouse is your companion (14).
 - 3. Your marriage is to produce godly offspring (15).
- C. What does the Lord think about divorce (16)?
 - 1. We must be on guard (15b, 16b).
 - 2. We must be people who live by faith.

Make It Personal: Do I value what the Lord values? What does the evidence say?

Thank God for the Book, yes, the whole Book! He has much to say to us from even the less familiar portions, as we're seeing in our current series in Malachi. Let's sing our theme song, which is the theme verse of the book. Then let's read today's text, and behold our great God in it.

Theme Song of Series: “Great Among the Nations (Malachi 1:11)”

My name will be great, great among the nations.

My name will be great, great among the nations.

*From the rising to the setting of the sun, my name will be great,
great among the nations.*

Scripture Reading: Malachi 2:10-16

There's an old joke that's been around for a long time about a man and a woman who had been married for fifty years. Someone asked them the secret of their marital bliss. The man said, “Well, the wife and I had an agreement when we first got married and that was that when she was bothered about something she would just tell me off and get it out of her system. If I was mad about something I would just take a walk.” He said, “I suppose you can attribute our marital success to the fact that I have largely lived an outdoor life.”

People have interesting views about the family, and what it takes to experience joy in it. This morning we're going to hear what God has to say about the family.

The family is under attack in our day. That's nothing new. We all know the very institution of the family is being challenged, even redefined by the movers and shakers around us. But what may surprise you is that the world is not the primary aggressor. A much more subtle enemy exists right within our very ranks.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Malachi series preached in 1994.

Again, this is nothing new, for it was the case in Malachi's day. In the fifth century BC, the family was under attack, and the problem wasn't simply the world, but the people of God themselves. And the Lord of hosts told them so.

The people of God in Malachi's day were guilty of a great crime. They were giving God the leftovers from their lives, practicing a watered-down, convenient type of religion. And God wasn't pleased with it, and told them so through Malachi.

The Lord of hosts made it clear that if His people were going to break out of this leftover mode, their priorities needed to change. The first two priorities, which we saw last week, applied directly to the priests, that is, the ministers, the clergy. First, God says a minister must value the glory of God (2:1-3). And second, a minister must value the Word of God (2:4-9), doing so in his personal life (5), and in his pastoral life (6-7). God says that ministers must speak the truth, live the truth, and lead others towards the truth.

That was last week's message. In 2:10, the focus shifts. The spotlight moves from the priests to the people. The priests' priorities were out of whack, for they diminished the importance of the glory of God and the Word of God. And this neglect produced an effect. Guess where it showed up? In the lives of the people, and specifically, in the homes of the people.

So, in Malachi 2:10-16, the Lord of hosts delivers a message to the people regarding their families through His servant Malachi. He makes it clear that there are two priorities, two covenant relationships, that are essential in the family. They were neglecting these priorities, as are many today, and it led to all kinds of family turmoil.

What we are about to hear today is the key to our maximum joy and His maximum glory in our homes. This is not an easy passage, even to translate. If you have the ESV, you'll note that there are *seven* textual variants in the footnotes. But the main thrust is quite clear. This is what the Creator of the family calls us to value.

The key word in this passage is the word "covenant". Malachi mentions two covenants, one in verse 10 (which he refers to as "the covenant of our fathers"), and the other in verse 14 ("the wife of your covenant").

What is a covenant? This is basic, yet vital. A covenant is an arrangement between two parties involving mutual obligations.² A covenant is a binding agreement, a promise, a commitment between two people. If the family is to be all that God intends it to be, we must grasp and live out the importance of covenant.

There are two main points in today's message. Malachi calls on his people and us to value two covenant relationships, which they'd been neglecting and now needed to prioritize. He says we need to value the **people** of God, and the **partner** God gives us.

I. Value the people of God (10-12).

Malachi ministered four centuries before Christ. He was a prophet to the people of God in Judah, in fact, the last prophetic voice before four hundred years of silence.

When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai and entered into a covenant relationship with them (the Mosaic covenant). He gave them the Torah, His Law, to show them how they were to live as His covenant people.

² Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, p. 530.

Today, we live under a covenant as well. We are not Israel, but the church, and we live under the new covenant. Yet one thing is true in both covenants. Those who are in a covenant relationship with God are also in a covenant relationship with each other. Here's the skeleton of point one. I'll state it and then we'll flesh it out.

- A. God has placed us in a covenant relationship with Himself and each other.
- B. God is not pleased when we devalue this covenant.
- C. The Lord identifies the consequences of violating this covenant (12).

A. God has placed us in a covenant relationship with Himself and each other.

In verse 10, Malachi asks his people three rhetorical questions, One, "Have we [referring to the Jews in Malachi's day] not all one Father?" The answer? Yes, we do. The prophet Isaiah said the same three centuries earlier, "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand (Isaiah 64:8)."

Two, "Has not one God created us?" Again, yes, He has. While Malachi may have in mind the Genesis account when God created mankind, he likely has in mind the Exodus account when God created the nation of Israel. Yes, Israel, we exist as a nation because God created us, says Malachi.

Three, "Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" Again, it's a rhetorical question. And the expected answer? There is absolutely no good reason why we should be doing this.

B. God is not pleased when we devalue this covenant. How were Malachi's people devaluing God's covenant? Malachi tells us in verse 10. Listen to the AV, "Why do we deal treacherously, every man against his brother?" The NIV puts it this way, "Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by *breaking faith* with one another." The ESV asks, "Why then are we *faithless* to one another?"

Like the word "covenant", this word is critical to the understanding of this passage. Notice the repetition of the word "faithless". We see it in verses 10, 11, 14, 15, & 16. The root Hebrew word *bagad* means "to act unfaithfully with respect to a prior agreement or covenant." That's just what the Jews had done to each other. They committed covenant violations against each other. They were "treacherous", faithless".

How do you identify a faithless person? Is it by listening to their words? According to Malachi, there's a more revealing way. Just look at their marriages.

Why would a woman get involved with a man who is not her husband? What would cause a man to look at pornography? In both cases, the cause is *faithlessness*. Malachi says this person who belongs to the community of God's people is acting like God doesn't exist. He or she has failed to exhibit faith and has become faithless.

What does it take to have a God-pleasing marriage? Good communication? Like-minded priorities? Embracing proper roles? While important, these are secondary matters. Here is the most important requirement for a God-pleasing, joy-filled marriage, and everything else that's needed flows from it, or doesn't.

Faith. God's kind of marriage requires a husband and wife to exhibit true, vibrant, moment by moment faith in the Great God. And here's why.

We don't have the power needed to follow the Creator's instruction manual. He tells us in black and white what it takes to have a joyful marriage. But on our own, we always go astray. God created us to live as dependent creatures. He must provide the power, and He does so for those who exhibit *faith*, who truly believe in Him and receive from Him the sufficient grace He offers.

I remember many years ago when I received a phone call from a couple who asked for marriage counseling. They were struggling, they said, and needed help. But the man made it clear, “I’m an agnostic, and I don’t to hear about God. I just want help for our relationship.”

At least he was honest. And so I honestly told him, “I’d be glad to help you. I’ll show you exactly what it takes to experience joy in your relationship. But you will not have the power needed to do what I show you. And you don’t to talk about the One who provides the power.”

I gave them some homework, and sent them on their way. The next week they returned, and the man said to me, “I almost didn’t come back.” I asked, “Why?” He said, “Because I don’t want to hear about God or Jesus.” I said, “Why then did you come back?” And he said, “Well, because last night I did the homework and read the pamphlet you gave us, *What to do when your marriage goes sour?*. It makes perfect sense. It describes our problem perfectly. But I don’t have the power to do what it says is necessary.”

This is Malachi’s point. Faithless people cannot experience the kind of marriages the Creator intends. They lack the power. And so I told the man in front of me.

“Here is what I’d like us to do. I’d like to keep meeting with you and give you two assignments each week. The first? I’d like to give you some homework that will help you get to know who Jesus really is, for I’m convinced that the God you don’t want to talk about doesn’t even exist. You don’t know the true God, and I want to help you get to know Him. The second? I want to give you resources that the true God has provided in His Word that will help your relationship with each other. Are you interested and willing to move forward?”

They said yes. About two months later, God regenerated that man, and the lady too professed that she too believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, for the first time in their lives, they had the power necessary to do the hard things that are essential to have a God-pleasing marriage.

The Jews in Malachi’s day devalued their covenant with each other. How? And how do we do the same? According to Malachi, it happens in two ways.

1. *It happens when we take advantage of fellow covenant members (10).* Look again at verse 10. It doesn’t just say “faithless”, but “faithless *to one another*”. If we are in a covenant relationship with God, it follows that we are also in a covenant relationship *with each other*. That was true for the Israelites, and for us too under the new covenant in the church.

When faith is absent, relationships disintegrate. Faithless people always begin to mistreat one another. Malachi says that his people were “dealing treacherously, every man against his brother.” One of the great themes of the prophets is social injustice. God abhors it when His people think only of themselves and take advantage of one other (see Amos 2:6-7). To hurt a fellow member of the covenant community is to hurt the whole community.

In the world, unregenerate people take advantage of others all the time. Many years ago I received this advertisement from a person trying to sell me his resource.

“Friend, Listen! This is today's 'real world' as reported on page 1 of *The Wall Street Journal*: 'I want my people to destroy our competitors. I want to kill and crush them,' barks the chief of BankAmerica's far-flung branch network. A little

more than two years ago, BankAmerica's survival was in doubt. Now net income is up 114%. This may be the only guy in the country who wouldn't benefit from my POWER NEGOTIATING techniques because he is already using them.”

This is the world in which we live, a world that operates by a dog-eat-dog mentality. But God has a higher standard for His covenant people. We are not to use each other. We're not to bring lawsuits against a fellow-follower of Christ (see 1 Cor 6). We're not to take advantage of our brothers in business deals, or in any other way.

Such action is *faithless*. And if I violate my brother in a business deal on Friday, what does God think of my worship on Sunday? We get a pretty good idea by listening to Malachi's words in verse 12, “May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!”

But there's a very specific way in which the covenant is devalued.

2. *It happens when we enter mixed marriages (11)*. Notice verse 11, “Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves.”

Stop there for a moment. This is a serious indictment. Malachi says to his people, “You have profaned the sanctuary [AV ‘the holiness’] of the LORD.” God created the nation of Israel to reveal His holiness to the world. Look at Israel, and you'll see what I'm like. That was the plan. But His people cheapened His holiness.

How? By their blemished sacrifices? Yes, that's one way, and Malachi confronted it in chapter one. But that's not what he has in mind here.

Notice the end of 11, “And has married the daughter of a foreign god.” The word “married” is the root of the Hebrew noun *baal*, which means “lord, master, husband.” You remember Baal. He was a pagan Canaanite god.

We see him in Numbers 25:3 (AV), which says, “And Israel *joined* himself to Baal-peor; and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.” For hundreds of years, the Israelites were enticed by Baal and other pagan gods, and far too often they yielded.

The prophets called it adultery, for Yahweh, the true God, was their husband, yet they were essentially going to bed with other false gods like Baal. And right here we see one of the contributing factors to their spiritual adultery. Mixed marriages.

Malachi's not talking about marriages between different *races* (which is certainly fine), but between different *faiths* (which is never fine). Malachi has in mind the same problem that his contemporary Nehemiah confronted in Nehemiah 13:23–27.

“In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, ‘You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and *act treacherously* against our God by marrying foreign women?’”

So Jewish men who belonged to Yahweh's covenant people were marrying “foreign” women who did not belong to Yahweh's covenant people. And Nehemiah uses

the same word to sum up the problem. They were *acting treacherously* (verse 27). They were being *faithless*.

Ezra confronted it too, saying in Ezra 10:2, “We have *broken faith* with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.”

I’d like to make a pastoral observation. As parents, we all want our children to marry the right person. But I am alarmed when I see parental passivity in this area. Some parents (even Christian) say, “Well, it’s not my place to say anything about who our children date, or when they date, or who they should marry.” Yet the same parents express lots of input regarding other decisions, like what kind of car to buy, or what college to attend, or what career to pursue.

Parents, we’re talking about the second biggest decision your child will make in life, next to what he or she does with Christ. And Malachi says we need to engage.

God’s Word couldn’t be clearer. He forbids His people to marry non-believers, for it’s a violation of the covenant. He tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:14–15, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”

Years ago, I made the decision that I will not perform a marriage ceremony for a Christian who wants to marry a non-Christian. For many reasons, including this one. Entering a mixed marriage devalues God’s covenant with His people (we’ll see a specific way this happens in a moment).

“But why does it really matter?” you ask. “These two people love each other.”

C. The Lord identifies the consequences of violating this covenant (12). We just read those consequences in verse 12. They show up in two areas.

1. *There are spiritual consequences.*

2. *There are social consequences.* And the two go hand in hand. What did Malachi ask the Lord to do to those who committed this particular sin of entering mixed marriage? *Excommunication*. “May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this...”

You say, “Excommunication? That sounds harsh.” Actually, while it’s painful, it’s an expression of love, for the Lord, for His people, for His good redemptive purpose for His people and the world, and even for the person who is thinking about marrying outside the covenant.

It’s important to clarify something. A person can be in this situation for different reasons. Perhaps both were non-believers when they married, and then one became a Christian. This is the scenario Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 7. Stay with that unbelieving spouse, says Paul. The Lord may use you to sanctify that home.

But what about the Christian who deliberately chooses to marry a non-believer? Malachi is telling us what even human experience tells us. There are consequences. I have seen men and women weep over such consequences as they do life married to a person that they love dearly who does not love the One they love supremely.

Is there hope for that person? Certainly! and for every other person, no matter what sins we have committed. The cross of Jesus says yes, God offers forgiveness! His own Son died for sinners, and when sinners repent and put their trust in Him, God

forgives them and gives them eternal life and enables them to experience His joy even in this life.

Malachi calls on his people and us to value two covenant relationships. The first? We're to value the people of God, remembering that the choices I make affect not just me, but my covenant family, the people with whom I'm doing life and will spend eternity.

II. Value the partner God gives us (13-16).

Once again, allow me to give the skeleton first, then we'll flesh it out. In verses 13-16, Malachi is going to address three related questions for us.

A. What does the Lord think about a person who weeps at the altar (13)?

B. What does the Lord think about marriage (14-15)?

C. What does the Lord think about divorce (16)?

A. What does the Lord think about a person who weeps at the altar (13)?

Verse 13 says, "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."

The scene in verse 13 is in the temple. The Jews were bringing their offerings to the altar. That's good, isn't it? But God seemed distant and disinterested, and they were saying so. "God, why aren't You helping me? I brought this sacrifice. Don't You care?"

Malachi said the people were *flooding* God's altar with their tears. Didn't God hear them? Sure, He did. Why didn't He answer? Because they had unconfessed sin in their lives. Which sin? We'll see in a moment, but first a more personal question.

"What does the Lord think about people who weep at the altar?" is a good question for us in Appalachia. There's a lot of weeping at the altar in our region.

This is problematic for two reasons. First, do New Testament churches have altars? Under the old covenant, the Jews had altars and offered their sacrifices on them, thousands of them. But do we have an altar? Yes. Where is it? It was on a hillside outside of Jerusalem. The cross of Jesus Christ is our altar, and His cross is empty, and His atonement finished.

So when a preacher today invites people to "Come to the altar", he's taking people back to the old covenant. But he's not an old covenant preacher. This is the new covenant. We invite people to come to Christ, not to the front of a church building. The crucified, Risen Christ is in heaven, and how do we come to Him? By faith, not by switching seats.

The second problem is the weeping. Just because a worship service is emotional does not mean it is pleasing to the Lord. This is certainly not a call for emotionless worship (that's a sermon for another time). But it is reason for caution. I think the common mentality in Appalachian churches is that if tears are flowing, the Spirit is working. But Malachi says that his people were covering the altar with their tears, yet the Lord was quite displeased with their worship.

Why? Because of sin. What sin? This brings us to our second question.

B. What does the Lord think about marriage (14-15)? What was the sin? We find out in verse 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."

There's the sin. Malachi's people had a very flippant view of marriage and divorce. Men were leaving their wives and crying at the altar at the same time. Isn't it

strange that they were in blatant violation of God's command, yet still going through their religious motions? Not really. We have the same tendency.

It's called selective obedience. It's related to selective teaching. In verse 9 the priests were selective in what they taught. Now in verse 13, the people are selective in how they obey.

How does Malachi help them? By reminding them of what God says about marriage. He gives them and us three truths to consider.

You may be thinking, "Well, I'm not married, so why does it matter?" One of the main reasons is because even if you are not married, you talk with people who are. You may even talk with people who are married and contemplating throwing in the towel. Are you prepared to help them see what God thinks about their marriage, or will you merely give them your opinions? God wants all of us, whether married or not, to know what He thinks about marriage.

1. *Your marriage is a covenant (14)*. In verse 14 Malachi rebukes the men for leaving their wives. Notice he calls marriage a *covenant*. Marriage is not a social contract, nor convenience. God says it is a binding covenant relationship. When two people say "I do", they are entering into a covenant and becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24). And who is the witness to these vows? The Lord is, says Malachi in verse 14.

The common mentality says, "Well if I'm not happy in my marriage, I should get out of it, right?" But that's not how covenant works. Suppose the Lord said that to us. Suppose He said, "Brad, I'm not happy with you. You've been sinning against Me. I'm going to end this relationship." I'm so thankful He will never say that, for He has made a covenant commitment to us. And so have we with our spouses, if we're married.

2. *Your spouse is your companion (14)*. If we read between the lines, this seems to be the scenario. In Malachi's day, guess what the middle-aged men were doing? In verse 14 Malachi speaks of "the wife of your youth". Apparently, the men were trading in their wives and running after younger women.

So Malachi confronts them. How can you do that? Your wife is not like an old coat that you hang onto until you're tired of it and get a new one. Your wife is your companion. She is your life partner.

The word "companion" means "joined together." It speaks of harmony and sharing. Malachi elaborates in verse 15, "Did He not make them one?" So if God says I am one with my spouse, it means I don't abandon her when the tough times come, or when I come to the conclusion she doesn't "make me happy" anymore. She is my covenant companion.

3. *Your marriage is to produce godly offspring (15)*. This is something we don't talk about enough. Listen carefully to verse 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."

God has several purposes in mind for marriage, including His glory, our edification into Christlikeness, and certainly our enjoyment. But which purpose does Malachi identify? What does he say God is seeking when a couple marries?

Godly offspring. When a man and woman marry, they have opportunity to make much of God by bringing godly offspring into the world.

Can two people of the same sex accomplish this objective? Can they bring offspring into the world? No, they can't. This is Biology 101. The Creator designed marriage with this objective in mind. Godly offspring.

Does this mean all married couples will have children? No. The Lord must open the womb, and sometimes He doesn't for purposes known to Him.

What about when a couple says, "We don't want children. They'll interfere with our careers.?" According to Malachi, such thinking is too horizontal and short-sighted.

One of the greatest privileges God grants married couples is the opportunity to bring the next generation of God-fearers into the world, either through bearing children, or adopting children, or investing in the lives of children in other ways. Making disciples begins in the home.

Godly offspring. This is what's on God's heart when He brings two people together and they enter the covenant of marriage. And this is why Malachi is confronting his people. The men were divorcing their wives and remarrying pagan women. How are you going to produce godly offspring by doing that?

As one commentator explains, "Only when both parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can the children be given the security which provides the basis for godly living. The family was intended to be the school in which God's way of life was practiced and learned."³

That's so helpful. Is your family a school of godliness? Are your children learning how to live for God in your home?

C. What does the Lord think about divorce (16)? This is a vital, yet delicate question. We could take a whole message to unpack what the Scriptures have to say about divorce, but for today, let's zero in on what God says in this one verse.

Verse 16 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. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

That's the ESV, but the other translations put it differently.

KJV "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away."

NASB "For I hate divorce, says the LORD."

NIV (1984) "I hate divorce, says the LORD God of Israel."

NIV (2011) "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the LORD God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect."

The differences have to do identifying the subject of the Hebrew verb. Malachi says, "He hates." Who hates? Is the subject *the Lord*, or is it *the man* who divorces his wife? There are good reasons for both translations, and I'll include them as an appendix if you're interested. But let's not miss the obvious. God is not pleased with divorce, and the reason He gives here is because of a specific outcome.

Do you see it? Malachi says that the man who divorces his wife "**covers his garments with violence.**" The prophet has in mind the innocent victims, those middle-aged-women who were abandoned by their husbands who went after the younger women.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way in *The Message*, "I hate the violent **dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage.**" Here's the NLT, "To divorce your wife is to **overwhelm her with cruelty.**"

This is one of the many reasons God hates divorce. Divorce hurts His people, His beloved covenant family.

³ Baldwin, p. 240-1.

Jesus reiterated this truth in Matthew 19:6 (AV), “What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

You say, “Wait a minute. Didn't Moses say divorce was permitted?” That's the very question the Pharisees raised. And while it is permitted in the cases of desertion and unrepentant immorality (see 1 Corinthians 7:15 and Matthew 19:9), here was Jesus' response in Matthew 19:8, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

According to the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “A man's covering himself...with his garment symbolizes marriage (cf. Ruth 3:9; Ezek. 16:8). But covering himself with violence describes violating the marriage relationship, which is what divorce does.”

To God, divorce is like a garment of violence, a gross injustice.

A. E. Hill writes, “The prophet deemed divorce a social crime and an act of violence or injustice, because it fractured the ‘social glue’ of the divinely ordained marriage covenant and deprived the divorced woman of the dignity and protection due to her according to the spousal agreement.”⁴

So what's the proper response? According to Malachi, two responses are in order.

1. *We must be on guard (15b, 16b)*. Malachi says this twice, at the end of verse 15, and again at the end of verse 16, “Guard yourselves!” Where? “In your spirit.” The NASB says, “So take heed to your spirit.” The LB says, “Guard your passions.”

2. *We must be people who live by faith*. “Do not be *faithless*,” says Malachi. There it is again, the other bookend. We saw the first in verse 10. “Why are we *faithless* to one another?” And now the second, “Do not be *faithless*.”

We are faithless when we fail to value the people of God, and specifically, if married, when we fail to value the partner God has given us.

Live by faith, says Malachi. And let that faith be seen.

At 7 P.M. on October 20, 1968, a few thousand spectators remained in the Mexico City Olympic Stadium. It was cool and dark. The last of the marathon runners, each exhausted, were being carried off to first-aid stations. The winner, Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia had finished the 26-mile race more than an hour earlier.

As the remaining spectators prepared to leave, suddenly the sound of sirens and police whistles was heard. All eyes turned to the gate. A lone figure wearing the colors of Tanzania entered the stadium. His name was John Stephen Akhwari. He was the last man to finish the marathon. His leg was bloodied and bandaged, having been severely injured in a fall. He grimaced with each step as he hobbled around the 400-meter track. The spectators rose and applauded him as if he were the winner. After crossing the finish line, Akhwari slowly walked off the field without turning to the cheering crowd. In view of his injury and having no chance of winning a medal, someone asked him why he had not quit. He replied, “My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it.”⁵

May God help us to have the same devotion, the same commitment to Him and to the covenants we have made--to the people of God, and to the partner He gives us.

Make It Personal: Do I value what the Lord values? What does the evidence say?

⁴ Hill, A. E. (2012). [*Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*](#) (D. G. Firth, Ed.; Vol. 28, p. 327). Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵ Story taken from *Leadership Journal*, Spring, 49

Closing Song: #438 “*Cleanse Me*” (verses 1, 2, 3)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Appendix: What the commentaries say about Malachi 2:16?

Quote by Hugenberger: “It is only with great difficulty and some changes to the text that the underlying Hebrew of v 16 can be made to say *I hate divorce* ... This apparent blanket condemnation of divorce seems to contradict the more lenient view of divorce in Dt. 24:1–4... It may be preferable, therefore, to understand the verse in this way: ‘If a man hates and divorces (*i.e.* divorces merely on the ground of aversion or incompatibility, rather than for cause, such as sexual misconduct), says the Lord, God of Israel, he covers his garment with violence ... Besides requiring no changes to the Hebrew text, this rendering has the advantage that it understands the subject of ‘hate’ as the divorcing husband, rather than God. In support of this interpretation it may be noted that this verb for ‘hate’ appears frequently in marriage contexts, where it invariably refers to the attitude of the husband towards his wife (Gn. 29:31; Dt. 22:13, 16; Jdg. 15:2).”⁶

Quote by Baldwin: “*For I hate divorce, says the Lord.* English Versions agree that this is the prophet’s meaning, even though the Hebrew in fact reads ‘if he hates send (her) away’, a sense found also in the ancient Versions. Evidently the text suffered early at the hands of some who wanted to bring Malachi’s teaching into line with that of Deuteronomy 24:1, which permitted divorce. Such a reading undermines all that the prophet is seeking to convey.”⁷

Quote by Baker: “Another textual option is to reread the verb as a masculine singular participle, “one (is) hating/hates,” necessitating a change of a single vowel from the MT,²³ which is the subject of the following verbs. Some read the form as a verbal adjective (*i.e.*, “Divorce is hateful”), which does fit the context. An option preferred here is that the subject is not Yahweh but is impersonal, “one,” who in this case is the husband in the marriage under discussion. It is his hating that is condemned, using a root that occurs elsewhere in the context of marriage (Gen. 29:31, 33; Deut. 21:15–17; 22:13, 16; 24:3; Judg. 14:16; 15:2; Prov. 30:23; Isa. 60:15).”⁸

Community Group Discussion:

1. The title for our series in Malachi is “*Great Among the Nations*”. Spend a few moments reviewing who Malachi was, when he served, and what he’s trying to accomplish in this book.
2. Take time to read again this morning’s text, Malachi 2:1-9, in which the LORD of hosts talks about the family. What do we learn about the family from this passage?
3. In verses 10-12 we learn that Malachi’s people were violating God’s covenant by being “faithless to one another”. What were they doing specifically, and why was God not pleased? Today we live under the new covenant. Is it possible for us to be faithless to one another, and if so, how?
4. In verse 13, what message does the Lord give to a person who weeps at the altar? Why were Malachi’s people weeping at the altar? When is being emotional in worship a good thing, and when is it not good?
5. What do we learn about marriage in verses 13-15? What’s one of the purposes of marriage according to verse 15? Are there other purposes?
6. What are ways we can help each other have families that please the Lord? After discussing, spend time praying for the families of this church.

⁶ Hugenberger, G. P. (1994). [Malachi](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 887). Inter-Varsity Press.

⁷ Baldwin, J. G. (1972). [Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Vol. 28, p. 262). InterVarsity Press.

⁸ Baker, D. W. (2006). [Joel, Obadiah, Malachi](#) (p. 258). Zondervan Publishing House.