

The Question of Faithfulness

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Date: 29 June 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, we've come to God's Word now, reading again from Malachi and Robert Herbrat is going to come and read God's Word for us. So, we're to Malachi chapter 2, verse 10 to 16. If you have a church Bible in front, do pick it up. If you have your own Bible, turn to Malachi, keep it open. The words are also up on the screen. So, let's read God's Word together.

Malachi 2, verse 10.

As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord remove him from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty. Malachi 3, verse 10.

As for the man who does this, he says, He says, weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offering or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why? It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the life of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her.

Though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel, does violence to the one we should protect, says the Lord God Almighty. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful.

[2 : 14] Well, do keep your Bible open at that passage from Malachi chapter 2. Thanks to Robert for reading and Monica and Melissa for reading us in praise. And also to Jill for sharing her story with us.

Let's pray and ask for God's help as we read these verses together. Thank you, our God, that you are the one God who made us. You are the one God who is our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we pray this afternoon that you would help us through your spirit to know how we should live for you in this world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this week I was reading about the divorce of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. I'm sure you know them, famous celebrities. And it's amazing what you end up reading when you're in the dentist's waiting room. And there's not much to read. So anyway, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt were divorced. And after six children and over eight years of intense legal battling, their divorce was finally settled in December 2024. And Brad Pitt said this in the interview. He said, No, I don't think it was a major thing, just something coming to fruition legally.

Now for him, it doesn't seem divorce was that big of a deal despite six children and eight years of battling. And I guess divorce for some people just isn't that big of a deal. But Malachi chapter 2, verse 10 to 16 tells us that God is against divorce. As you heard this read to us, there's no mistaking that fact. But we need to look carefully at this text to see why. Because it is for good reason that God is opposed to divorce. Now this dispute is the third dispute in Malachi.

Now you remember, there are six. It's like a courtroom scene as God contests with his people, their behavior, their living, and he challenges them. And they counter God by questioning God.

[4 : 32] And so this is the third of these disputes. And so it is instructive for us all. Because we live in a culture where the relationship philosophy is basically hook up, shack up, and break up. And that tends to be how people expect relationships will be in our society. And so what God says here applies to everybody, whether you call yourself a Christian or not. And whatever your relationship status, whether you're single or married or divorced, what God says here applies to each and every one of us.

And so as we approach this message, we approach it with sensitivity, because many of us will have experienced the pain and hurt of divorce, whether personally, in our families, or perhaps indirectly, in those we know and love who we have connection with. And so we're going to hear what God says here, because what God says to us, he says to us, because he loves us. And that's really the

context of everything that God says in Malachi. Remember the beginning, Malachi chapter 1, verse 2.

We read, I have loved you, says the Lord. And so because God loves us, what he says to us is for our own good, because God wants us to flourish as human beings. He doesn't want us to hurt ourselves, and he doesn't want us to get into relationships with other people, and then hurt other people through the relationship choices that we made. And so we've got to listen to God's voice, and let his message shape our relationships. Because we've got a choice. If we don't listen to God's message, and let his word shape our relationships, instead, our relationships will be shaped by the message that our culture preaches to us. And our culture does preach a particular message about how we should relate to people as humans. And so the people in Malachi were being unfaithful to one another, and therefore they were being unfaithful in their covenant with God. And so the message here in these verses is basically a message about being faithful to God, and being faithful to one another in our relationships. And so the people were being unfaithful in their marriage relationships, and so God has to rebuke them for their unfaithfulness. And you'll see that this is the main theme of the section. If you look down your Bible, the word unfaithful, or in some translations, faithless, appears five times. Verse 10, verse 11, verse 14, verse 15, and verse 16. So unfaithful, or faithless, is the theme of these verses. And so the application then for us, as it was for the people then, is to be faithful. And so the Lord's passionate appeal to his people, whether now or then, is to be faithful people. Faithful to him and faithful to one another. So we're going to look at a few things this afternoon. First of all, a faithful God. Second, a faithless people. And then third, a faithful life. So first of all, a faithful God. Malachi here is speaking of God's covenant faithfulness. So verse 10. Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another? So we know from the Bible that God has entered into a covenant with his people. But the people were profaning the covenant here by being unfaithful to one another. Now last time we saw that the priests were being rebuked because they had failed to instruct the people in God's ways. And because of that, the consequence of this was the collapse of marriage amongst the people. And so they turned from God's good design for marriage and for family, and they were being unfaithful. Now we'll see that we're doing this in a moment. But first of all, it's good to be reminded of God's faithfulness. God is faithful.

And so when he calls the people into covenant relationship with him, he wants his people to be faithful to him. And part of being faithful to him is being faithful to one another. So that's why we've got these questions in verse 10. Do we not all have one Father? Yes is the answer. And then did not one God create us? Again, yes is the answer. And so the people had one Father and one Creator, and so they were bound together as God's people. And that's why they were to be faithful to God and faithful to one another. Which meant being unfaithful to one another, it didn't just break relations between themselves, but it actually broke their relationship with God. Not just on the horizontal level, but on the vertical level too. And so this is a double rebuke from God, if you like. And so God calls out this unfaithfulness in marriage because God intended marriage itself to be a window onto the way that God relates to us as people. And so throughout the Old Testament, and especially here in the prophecy of Malachi, the covenant relationship between God and his people is emphasized. The word covenant comes up again and again and again. Where it's clear that God loves his people, he loves his people fully and exclusively and permanently. God is committed to his people. He has a relationship of covenant faithfulness. God is faithful. And then when you get through to the New Testament part of the Bible, this again is explicitly expressed in the New Testament, when Paul speaks of husbands and wives in Ephesians chapter 5. He says this, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery that I am talking about Christ and the church. And so Paul is saying this one flesh union of faithfulness is a picture of the union between God and his people or Christ and his church. And so the story of the Bible is essentially a fantastic love story of God entering into a relationship of covenant faithfulness with his people. He loves his people, he's committed to his people, and he always will be. And so because God has designed marriage to point us to this relationship between God and us, Christ and his church, then it's hardly surprising that God calls us to be faithful to one another, especially in the relationship of marriage. God is a faithful God, and so he is for faithfulness in marriage. Therefore, he is against divorce. And so if we are his people, and we are to reflect his faithfulness in our relationships with one another. And that's why the unfaithfulness of the people here in Malachi in breaking their marriage covenants was a violation of their covenant relationship with God.

[12 : 50] And yet this isn't how we tend to see things, is it? I think we reckon that the way we treat other people in the world doesn't actually impact our relationship with God. Because we kind of like to compartmentalize our lives, don't we, and think that, well, what I do in this area doesn't really affect what I do in this other area. And so we think that how we behave in our human relationships, like marriage for example, has no bearing on our relationship with God. And Malachi here is saying it most certainly does.

Because our unfaithfulness, or our faithfulness to other people, or our mistreatment, or our treatment of other people, doesn't just impact the relationship we have with those other people, what Malachi is saying is that it impacts our relationship with God. We are not distinct. How we treat other people, especially in a marriage, impacts our relationship with God. Because the faithful God, who enters into our relationship with us, expects us to be faithful in our relationships with other people, especially with our managed partner, as we'll see. And so that's the first thing we need to see here, in verse 10, that God is a faithful God. Secondly, the people were unfaithful. They were a faithless people. And they were unfaithful in two ways. Firstly, they were unfaithful by marrying women who worship other gods. So that's the first thing. And secondly, they were unfaithful by wrongly divorcing their wives.

So that's broken marriages in verse 13 to 16. And so we're going to think about each. Mixed marriages, first of all, and then broken marriages. So mixed marriages, verse 11 and 12.

1. Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. 2. Okay, so God's people were marrying people who didn't worship God. 3. Okay, so committing spiritual adultery in a sense, because they were to be committed to God, and not the gods of other nations. And so God here is not opposing racially mixed marriages, which you misunderstand what's being said. So God did welcome foreign people into the people of Israel, but they devoted themselves to him. So this is not a racial statement that's being made here. It's a religious statement that's being made. So God is against religiously mixed marriages. What does that mean?

[15 : 52] Well, it means that God's people are not to marry people who are devoted to foreign or to false or to other gods. Because throughout Israel's history, God had specifically banned religiously mixed marriages.

So not all God's instructions to his people, they are always forbidden. So for example, there's lots of references I could give you. But for example, Deuteronomy chapter 7 says this, Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods. And the Lord's anger will burn against you, and quickly destroy you. So that explains the reason in a nutshell why God is against mixed marriages. Because marriages with people who worship other gods would turn people away from the Lord.

And so Malachi doesn't say, Listen guys, it's not ideal to get involved with other people from other nations who worship other gods. He doesn't say, It would be wise. He doesn't say, Try to avoid this if you possibly can.

No, what does he say? He says there, It is a detestable thing. In verse 11, It is being unfaithful. And he says, It desecrates the sanctuary of the Lord.

So let's look seriously, God regards his people getting married to people who aren't his people.

[17 : 36] So God's people shouldn't marry those who don't believe in God, and who don't share their faith in God. And so listen to what Malachi says about those who do this in verse 12.

As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord remove him from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty. Malachi is basically saying, he's praying in a sense, Lord, you need to cut off anyone who enters into a mixed marriage.

They should not be part of your people. This man, these men who do this should be removed from your covenant. They should be removed from the worship of you. And it's such strong language that's being used here.

And so before we move on, I guess we should think about how this applies to Christian believers today. And essentially, it applies in exactly the same way as it applies in Malachi's day.

So obviously, there's no prohibition to marrying someone from another race. Remember, we're not saying this is racially mixed marriages, it's religiously mixed marriages.

[18 : 51] And so marrying someone from another race, ethnicity, tribe, culture, or social group is good. But Malachi's saying, a Christian believer should marry a Christian believer, a fellow believer.

And so God is opposed to his people marrying people who don't believe in him. And this teaching is not just the Old Testament teaching, it continues on into the New Testament.

And the New Testament reiterates the warnings that we find in the Old Testament about believers marrying unbelievers. And so, for example, Paul, when he teaches about marriage in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, he reiterates this.

And Paul also, in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, he warns that believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers. And so Christians are told not to enter into marriage with anyone who isn't a Christian.

Why? Well, primarily because it is being unfaithful to God, as Malachi points out. But practically, it is also spiritual suicide, because it tends to turn believers away from serving God.

[20 : 17] Because a Christian's top priority should be being faithful to God by following Jesus. And so it's difficult, if not impossible, to live life with somebody who doesn't share that top priority with you.

Because you'll go and be pooling in different directions. And the danger is that a Christian gets pulled away from serving God.

And sadly, I've just seen this play out far too many times. When a Christian decides to get emotionally involved with somebody who isn't a Christian, what tends to happen is that they drift further and further away from God.

They stop wanting to go to church. They spend less time reading their Bible. They spend less time praying. Or they just give up altogether. And then they become less engaged with Christian friendships.

And then they're just not interested in serving God. And so it basically comes down to choosing between God and that other person, doesn't it?

[21 : 34] And that's why a Christian has thought to settle this matter in their heart and in their mind, that their relationship with God is more important than any other relationship in life.

And you're never too young to settle this matter in your head and in your heart. That you will not get involved with somebody who doesn't love God and follow Jesus.

And it's serious. Because as Malachi tells us, this is not just about human relationships here. This is connected to your relationship with God.

And so firstly, that's the first thing. Entering into mixed marriages, God says, no, don't go there. Don't do that. And secondly, it's not just mixed marriages that were the problem for the people of Malachi's day.

The second problem was broken marriages. Let's read this in verse 13 and 14. Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears.

[22 : 43] You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why? It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth.

You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

And so God, here, he won't accept the people's offerings because they're being unfaithful.

So men were divorcing their wives for no good reason. Whether that's because they were trading them in for younger models, or whether that's because they were seeking some kind of social or economic benefit by marrying people from other nations.

We're not sure, possibly or probably both. The fact is, they were breaking their marriage covenants. And the Lord himself says he is the witness to their marriages.

Because even still, in every marriage, vows are taken, not just before humans, but are taken before God. And so it's like God gives his invisible signature to the marriage schedule.

[23 : 56] As a man and a woman enter into this covenant relationship for life, God sees what's going on. And what a man and woman are promising to one another.

And that's why this word covenant is so significant here. Because whilst the scriptures are full of God's covenant relationship, God's covenant faithfulness to his people, it's significant because this word covenant is also used here when it comes to marriage.

Because it's describing the faithfulness that should be in a marriage between a man and a woman.

And that's why wrongfully breaking a marriage is so offensive to God.

And so the people couldn't please God with their offerings because they weren't pleasing God with their lives. And this all emphasizes just how important marriage is to God.

Look at verse 15. As not the one God made you, you belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring.

[25 : 08] So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. Now verse 15 and 16 are difficult to translate. But verse 15, this verse is probably referring to God's creation design for marriage.

It's an echo back to Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 where the one alludes basically to the man and woman becoming one flesh. Genesis 2, 24.

Because God designed marriage to unite husband with wife, not just physically, but in every way. And so we hear that God invented this one flesh union to produce children, godly offspring.

Because the godly offspring are to continue God's covenant community in this world. But how will the godly offspring come if the marriages are mixed or if the marriages are broken?

For example, if one parent doesn't know God and they're in a marriage with one parent who does know God, then how can one parent who doesn't know God teach the children anything about God?

[26 : 22] They just can't. And so if God's people marry those outwith the covenant community, it hinders rather than helps children grow up to know and love God.

And so all of this coming together in Malachi essentially points to God's purpose for marriage and for family life.

For God's people should only enter into marriage with others who are God's covenant people. And they should be faithful in those marriages and should produce godly offspring, or covenant children who grow up to know and love the Lord.

So that the people of God will continue for generation after generation after generation. But this just doesn't work. But God's people violate the covenant either by marrying unbelievers or by breaking their marriages.

And so can you see how this is God's great plan for his people? So God has this covenantal vision for marriage that is so powerful that it impacts, whether positively or negatively, not just the one couple who decide to get married, but it impacts everything.

[27 : 44] Because marriage both witnesses to and works out God's saving purposes for this world. And that's why destroying God's good purposes for marriage not really does great damage to people, but to his covenant purposes through his people.

And so the reason God is so strongly opposed to divorce is because he is so strongly for marriage. Verse 16, the man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel, does violence to the one who should protect.

The one he should protect, says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. Verse 16 is a really challenging verse to translate and to understand.

And it's as the weather, and you see this from the footnote, the verse is saying that the Lord is saying, I hate divorce. Or is it saying that the man hates and divorces his wife?

And I reckon the context suggests that it's the man who hates and divorces his wife, and so he does violence against her. However, in his translated, we should certainly understand the message of the verse, which is God is opposed to divorce.

[29 : 09] And we could say he hates it. Why? Because it breaks this marriage covenant. And of course that doesn't mean that God hates divorced people.

And of course it doesn't mean that every divorce is wrong. But it's because God loves people that he hates the trauma that divorce causes.

And so the context here in Malachi is that Israelite wives were being abandoned by their husbands who were being unfaithful to them.

And God didn't want that to happen. And now, we can't say all there is to say about divorce from these verses, or touch on every pastoral issue that is connected with a divorce.

However, we should say that divorce wasn't permitted in Old Testament law. But it was only permitted because of human sin, in Deuteronomy chapter 24.

[30 : 13] And that's why Jesus also condemned divorce. But it is permitted on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness or adultery. And Paul, too, was against divorce.

But it was permitted on the grounds, and is permitted, on the grounds of abandonment. So adultery and abandonment are biblical grounds for divorce.

Because from the creation, God had designed marriage as this covenant relationship of lifelong faithfulness between one man and one woman.

And so operating in any way that is outside of God's good-loving design for human relationships is to be unfaithful to him.

And so that's our second point. A faithful God. Secondly, a faithless people. And then thirdly, a faithful life. And we'll get this as we close.

[31 : 21] Verse 15 and 16. So the Lord has rebuked his people for being unfaithful. And so what does he do? Well, he calls them to faithfulness. And he summons them to be on your guard.

So verse 15 says, So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. So he's specifically addressing those who were being unfaithful to their wives.

But then this be on your guard command is repeated in verse 16. And it's for everybody this time. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

And that's the Lord's passionate appeal to his people. So whether then, in Malachi's day, or now, for us, it is be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

It is a call for vigilance, and a call for faithfulness. Whatever our relationship state is, because we all know relationships can be messy.

[32 : 27] And yet God's standard command for everybody, whether single, or married, or divorced, is the same. God calls his people to live out his creation design for marriage.

Because verse 10, he's our creator, and he made us. And he's our father, and he loves us. And so God knows how we will flourish best as human beings.

And that's why marriage is meant to be this exclusive and permanent relationship between one man and one woman. And it's to be the only context for sexual intimacy.

And so that's why stepping outside God's good boundaries for sex and marriage results in pain and hurt for ourselves and for others.

And so Malachi's message here is blunt. Malachi's message here is direct. And Malachi's speaking God's word.

[33 : 27] And although all relationships are different, all relationships are complex and messy, I think the general application here is clear. And so we shouldn't miss the obvious.

And that is God calls his people to be faithful. And so whatever our relationship status, we need to seek this. And we need to hear this.

We need to be on our guard against anything that would cause us to be unfaithful. Unfaithful. Unfaithful to God. Unfaithful to those who are in relationship with.

Especially our marriage partner. As we need to be on our guard against anything that would make us break our marriage vows. Which means we should seek help when marriages are under strain. And we should only ever consider divorce on biblical grounds. And only as a regrettable last step. So be faithful if you're married.

[34 : 34] But be faithful if you're single. By being on guard against becoming too involved with somebody who doesn't believe. Or about getting too intimate with somebody who you're not married to.

In short, the command here is be faithful. Be faithful if you aren't married. Be faithful before you're married.

Be faithful while you're married. And be faithful if you marry. If you're single. And so none of us should ever think that we don't need to guard ourselves.

As if we are somehow immune to getting sucked into and involved in an inappropriate relationship. We should never think that my marriage will never break up.

Because we can all let our guard down. And be unfaithful. Unfaithful with their desires. With their thoughts. With their eyes. With their words. Because when you think about it.

[35 : 41] All the marriages that end in divorce start in those ways. Don't they? If we don't realise. There but for the grace of God. Why? And we don't know.

Our sinful hearts. Well. Enough. Well. Okay. It's fine to talk about being faithful in theory. Isn't it? And this is what this is.

Being faithful in theory. We're hearing what God says. But. What if I'm unfaithful in practice? The truth is. We all have.

And so we all deserve to be cut off from God. To be removed. But the good news is. And this is where we conclude.

The good news is that there is one. Who has been faithful for us. And he has been faithful to us. Jesus Christ is the only truly faithful one.

[36 : 36] Faithful to God. Living a life of perfect obedience. Free from sin for us. But also faithful for us. Because his faithfulness pays for all of our sinful unfaithfulness.

Jesus Christ loved his bride, the church. And gave himself up for her. To make her holy. And to present her as radiantly beautiful.

So Jesus is our only hope. And Jesus is our only help. Whether we're married, single, or divorced. And so whatever our relationships have been in the past.

Some things will never be forgotten. But they can be forgiven. And so we don't need to live with the guilt and the shame. And whatever our relationship status now.

We should never think that we are in so much of a mess. That Jesus would never receive us. Whether we're not a Christian and we're in a mess.

[37 : 42] Or we are a Christian and we live in a mess. We can go to Jesus. He will welcome us back. And he will forgive us. Because he loves us. Despite what we are.

And no matter what we have done. We will find forgiveness from Jesus. For all of our unfaithfulness. That to continue. Being unfaithful.

But by God's grace. Live a faithful life. With his help. Let's pray. Let's pray.