

Studies in Malachi #2: Issues of Marriage

In review, we began looking at various offenses the people were committing against God. They denied God's love, they offered unworthy sacrifices, and their priests were unfaithful, hypocritical, and half-hearted.

Today we will look at some offenses against God concerning marriage. Although the texts and my comments refer to men, it should be obvious that most of the concepts apply similarly to women.

Offence #4 – They profaned the covenant by intermarrying with the heathen (2:10-13)

2:11 – “Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.”

This was a common pitfall for God's people. It was what caused 24,000 to perish by a plague in the wilderness, in Num. 25. “... and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.”

This was also the downfall of Solomon, in 1 K. 11:1-11. He loved many strange (non-Jewish) women, in direct disobedience to God's commands. “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.”

It was also a huge problem in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, when it was found that very many of the men returning from Persia had married Gentile women, and were thus ineligible for priesthood.

This has meaning for us as Christians also, even if we are not born Jews. A man and wife must be “walking together” (Amos 3:3). It is a most basic conflict when one is a Christian, and one is not. The ideal is for both man and woman, not just to be saved, but agreed in theology, level of commitment, outlook on life, discipleship, parenting, etc. Many problems arise when this is not the case.

There are a great number of complications that arise in emotional involvements, as

- Is one or both parties Christian? (really Christian, by a new birth)
- What are their levels of commitment to the faith? How spiritually serious are they?
- Has either of them already been married? divorced? widowed? Are children involved?
- Are they already married? Are they living together unmarried?
- Is an unsaved partner willing to remain in marriage?

In the OT, God's people were enjoined from marrying foreigners, not because they were inherently “better” than them, but because there would be a practically inevitable succumbing to the worship of their false gods. God's command is that we have no other gods before him. We may not be confronted in this country by literal idols, but there are other kinds of idolatry that threaten us. We should take marriage as a most holy and serious commitment, and one in which two people are committed together to a life of holy worship and service to God, and one of faithfulness to God and to each other. For this reason it is a most grievous danger to enter into an emotional attachment with an unbeliever. It is a trap, a slippery slope, starting with a physical or emotional lure. “We are just friends.” The believer tends to rationalize the relationship, as “he's not so bad”; “she's really good inside”; “I will be able to change him later; etc. The natural and almost universal result is that the unbeliever drags the believer down spiritually.

Lessons:

1. We must be especially careful on who we marry, so that their unbelief does not become a snare and hindrance to us.
2. We must guard against all spiritual adultery and idolatry. God is to be our one and only God, and we are to give no worship elsewhere, as movie stars, politics, materialism, or even spousal and family ties.

Offence #5 – They divorce their wives (2:13-16)

This section says that they were “dealing treacherously” against their wives, and “putting them away” (i.e., divorcing them). God himself is a witness against them, and the abandoning of their vows. The issue is still valid today. A man marries a beautiful young girl, and she is “his companion, the wife of his youth”, and “the

wife of his covenant” (2:14). But over time her beauty fades (as does his), and he decides he needs to get a newer model. But a wife is not to be treated like an old car, to be replaced when it shows signs of age. Marriage is not a limited contract like a lease, but a covenant (2:14).

People generally vow “till death do us part” at marriage. Sometimes they don’t really mean it, they are just words to be ignored when the time comes. Usually I think people really do mean it at the time, but take no pains to maintain and cultivate that commitment. So when difficulties arise, or the bloom fades and reality sets in, they drift apart until divorce. People think it would just be easier to call it quits and start over, so they wash, rinse, and repeat. But what about that covenant? Does God forget it as easily as men and women? We promised to be faithful.

We have all heard that the divorce rates among Christians are as high as among unbelievers, but I just don’t believe it. I could concede that those rates are as high among people who “claim” to be Christian, but only because they have such an ignorant conception of what it means to be Christian. They may be church goers, or “Christian by default” (they live in America and are not Hindu, Moslem, or Buddhist). Divorce among genuine born again Christians does occur, but I cannot believe the rates are as high as they say.

Some NT directions for marriage are:

1. The only scriptural view of cohabitation is formal marriage, with no sexual activities beforehand. Fornication is forbidden, and is listed as one of the things that prevent people from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-20, and Ac. 15:28-29).
2. Christians should marry Christians. 2 Cor. 6:14-18 (not to be unequally yoked)
3. A believer should not divorce their spouse, but if they do, should remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:10-11).
4. A believer is not to divorce an unbelieving spouse who is willing to stay married. But if an unbelieving spouse is determined to leave the marriage, then the believer should let them go (1 Cor. 7:12-15).
5. A widow(er) is free to remarry if they want, “only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

What else does Malachi say about it? 2:13-14 says they made their sacrifices with weeping and mourning, and couldn’t understand why God was not answering their prayers. His answer is that he is a witness of their broken vows of marriage, and that he sees their treacherous dealings against the wives of their youth. 1 P. 3:7 says husbands are to give honor to their wives as the weaker vessels, “that your prayers be not hindered”.

It also says that God’s purpose for marriage is (not merely our personal satisfaction and happiness) “that he might seek a godly seed” (2:15). My heart and prayers go out to those who desperately want children and are unable, but in truth, many people really do not want children. They see marriage, not as a God-ordained means of perpetuating mankind and bringing new members into his kingdom, but just as a way to live life in a cooperative way with another person. To them, the purpose is merely companionship, sexual release, financial and domestic cooperation, and security.

Lessons:

1. We must take heed to our spirit that we deal not treacherously against our wives.
2. We must see marriage as a covenant, not just a temporary mutual agreement.
3. We must see that mistreating and dishonoring our wives is a serious sin and cause of unanswered prayer.
4. We must recognize child bearing and proper upbringing as one of the primary , of marriage.
5. We must see that God hates divorce (although it is recognized, and in certain cases allowed (Mt. 18:8-9)

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