

**Malachi 2:10-16 (1984 NIV)**  
***God Blesses Faithful Devotion***

<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

<sup>11</sup> Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

<sup>12</sup> As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

<sup>13</sup> Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

<sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" 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.

<sup>15</sup> Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

<sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.  
So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

## **Introduction**

Story is told of a pastor who decided to experiment with changing those sad statistics in his church. He made a list of 12 people who had recently been baptized in their church, and then he and his wife invited them over. Naturally, these new Christians were thrilled to be invited to their pastor's house.

After dinner the pastor sat down with this group of enthusiastic new Christians, and he asked them an unexpected question. He asked if they would like for him to predict their futures for the next two or three years. They were a little surprised at that, but they all said "yes". So the Pastor made this prediction, saying:

"As I look at the 12 of you, I must predict that statistically speaking in the next two or three years:

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- Two of your marriages will break up and your feelings of shame will cause you to leave the church.
- Three of you will have conflict with someone in the church and you will also leave the church.
- One of you will experience tragedy and lose faith and you too will leave the church.
- Two of you will have some sort of moral failing and will leave the church.
- Two of the four remaining will simply lose interest and drift away from the church.

So in two or three years, out of this group of 12 only two of you will still be attending church ... and only one of you will still be attending THIS church.”

There was dead silence in the room. All these wide-eyed new Christians looked around at each other as if to say, “How could that happen to us?”

Finally, one of them spoke up and asked, “What can we do to change those statistics?”

The pastor was waiting to hear that question. He answered, “You can get together and determine as a group that you are not going to let anyone go.”

That was exactly what they did.

These strangers who had never been together until that gathering at the pastor’s home formed themselves into a small group. Week by week they came to really know God and one another; to remind themselves to be faithful in their devotion to God and to one another. They supported each other through the tragedies, conflicts, and moral failings that happened in their lives. In four years of meeting together, only one person left the church. That small caring group changed the statistics from losing 10 out of 12 to losing only one out of 12.

This is what will happen when God’s people decide that they will help one another not to break faith with God and with one another.

(<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/30522/small-groups-by-k-edward-skidmore>)

Malachi 2:10-16 is God’s rebuke to His people because they have lost their devotion not only to Him, but also to one another, especially in their husband-wife relationship. In fact, breaking faith with each other in their marital

relationship is just a reflection of a bigger problem—i.e. their breaking faith in their covenantal relationship with God as His people.

God was using Malachi to address a prevailing problem among His people at that time. The people in their fallenness had profaned, broken faith with God, and lost their devotion to the laws of God as evident in their broken marriage and family relationships.

Malachi was dealing with a situation where Hebrew men got rid of their wives and married pagan women. Before, both man and wife shared one faith in their devotion to the same God. Now, the man and his new wife didn't share that oneness. The prophet denounced this as a profanity (or treachery in another Bible translation) to God as well as to the wives concerned. God through Malachi wanted His people then to realize that this failure was a sin and displeasing to God.

Malachi tells why sharing one faith in God can help deter breaking faith with Him.

### **I. Sharing one faith in God helps to preserve godly worship and obedience (vv. 10-12).**

Malachi 2:10 poses three questions:

- Have we not all one Father?
- Did not one God create us?
- Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

The Hebrew people were punished by God and sent into captivity for some 70 years. After this long captivity, the people now viewed Yahweh as their one Father and one God. And because the people were to now worship Yahweh as their one Father and one God, Malachi reminded them of their responsibility to keep the covenant that God had made with their forefathers—i.e. to worship and obey Him in faithful devotion.

But in Malachi's time, there were Hebrew men who were breaking faith with their spouses—they were divorcing them and marrying pagan women who had settled in Israel. This was in direct violation of God's Law to them. The Law strictly prohibited intermarriage with the pagans (Ex. 34:11; Deut. 7:1-4).

Malachi charged the people for being unfaithful to God. He used very harsh language, and so the sin must have a greater implication than merely a marital breakup.

Malachi identified this greater implication in v. 11—"Judah has broken faith (committed a treachery). A detestable thing (abomination) has been

committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated (profaned) the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.”

Malachi charged that treachery, abomination, and profanity had been committed by God’s people. It is clear that the intermarriage of Israelites with pagans was repugnant to God because it not only defiled the holiness of God in the sanctuary but also in the family of Israel. The history of unfaithfulness to God was in danger of repeating itself.

In the OT, God established the marriage laws (Lev. 21:14, 15; Neh. 13:29) in order that His people might stand distinct from the other nations. Now, however, the returning Jews had again profaned that distinctness “by marrying the daughter of a foreign god”. This expression refers to more than just a person of different race, but a worshiper of a different deity. It would destroy Israelite worship and spiritual faithfulness.

So, it’s really not because God is racist, but such marriages would destroy and undermine the people’s faithfulness to God and true worship of Him.

For such a person who had been so strayed away, Mal. 2:12 has this dreadful warning from the Lord—“As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.”

The cutting off would be so total that even the offerings on the altar would be rejected by God Himself. That person’s offerings would not be acceptable to God because God sees his heart. It’s not a heart wanting to repent and turn back to God. Rather, it’s one that tried to mask the person’s deliberate defiance of God so that he could look good before others. It’s one that tried to ease the guilty conscience so that the person could keep on doing the same thing not pleasing before God.

That’s why God called it treachery. In Malachi’s context, the outward sign of dedication to the Lord was betrayed by the treachery of uniting with paganism.

This kind of behaviour was especially heartbreaking to God. They didn’t stand apart from the other nations to be His spiritual light. Rather, they chose to be like the other nations and be hidden in pagan darkness.

Hebrew men had chosen to violate God’s law by abandoning their wives and marrying pagan women. The decline in Yahweh worship and obedience in Malachi’s time was not because pagan partners were saying to their Hebrew spouses, “Don’t give anything to your God” or “Give half of our best to your God and the other half to my god.” I believe they were leading their men astray by saying, “Yes, give to your God but no need to give the first and best. Give the leftovers and lesser things. There are more important things in our lives than your God.”

160 years before the birth of Jesus, Antiochus IV, King of Syria, had conquered Jerusalem. He decided to destroy the Jewish religion and make the Jews deny their faith in God. Among the many things he did was to order the people to sacrifice pigs upon the altar. Of course this was an abomination to the Jews.

Jewish history records the story of one Jewish mother with seven sons. The soldiers came first to the oldest son and ordered him to offer a pig upon the altar. The son refused. So they cut out his tongue. Still he refused. So they cut off his hands and feet, and threw his mangled body into a pit of fire.

They went to the second son and ordered him to offer a pig upon the altar. When he refused, they fried him alive in a giant pan. The third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth all refused and all died after a variety of horrible tortures.

Finally they came to the youngest in the family, just a little boy. Even the most hardened of the soldiers didn't want to see him die. So they went to the mother and said, "If you'll just ask him to place the pork to his lips, that will be enough, and we'll spare his life."

Jewish history records that the mother took her youngest son and said to him, "Son, I carried you in my womb for nine months. I nursed you for three years. I raised you for a moment like this. I encourage you to stand strong in your faith and follow in the steps of your brothers. And when you die, I will die to be with you."

This persecution took place after the time of Malachi. But the Jews then didn't break faith with God in the face of pagan threat. In fact, such was their faithful devotion to God that they countered this threat with what's known in Jewish history as the Maccabean Revival/Revolt.

Aren't we glad that God has not called us to die for our faith like that? In fact, His call for us today is to live boldly for Him in this world, not to die unnecessarily for Him.

(<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/dont-leave--your-kids-behind-melvin-newland-sermon-on-children-42900?page=2>)

When all in the family share one faith and stand firm in God, it helps to preserve godly worship and obedience. Not only that ...

## **II. Sharing one faith in God helps to pass on godly worship and obedience (vv. 13-16).**

Malachi painted a dramatic picture with these words in vv. 13-14 - "Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail

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because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' 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."

The wives who had been put away were in great mourning and anguish. Their woe rose to God with such intensity that God no longer could give attention to the offerings brought by the men.

Imagine this—here were men, calloused and unfaithful to their marriage vows, coming to the sanctuary with their impressive gifts of dedication and thanksgiving. But over there were their unfortunate wives, now abandoned, praying and crying to God for help. The wives' tears were what God saw, not the offerings of their husbands. In fact, not only were their offerings rejected by God, but also their prayers as well.

The men concerned had been told by the prophet that God was rejecting their worship, but their response was not fear and repentance. Rather, it was a defiant challenge—"Why?" They thought that if they did the worship routine well enough and gave to the sanctuary, they would be highly favoured in the courts of heaven. It's like a man who is all determined to continue in his sinful ways, and he comes to church to worship BUT with a hardened attitude—not to change but just to ease his conscience a bit ... and he expects God to be okay with that.

To the challenge of the men's "why", Malachi took them back to the marriage of their youth. He reminded them that it was a covenant witnessed by God Himself. Thus, to break that marriage was to break faith not only with the wife of one's youth, but also with God who was witness to that covenant.

Malachi also described the wife as a man's "partner" ("companion"). This carries the idea of someone bound together with another, sharing the grief, joys, successes, failures, hard times, and good times in their life together. But now, these wives were being cast aside for some women new but thoroughly pagan. Malachi said that treachery was committed against wives like these.

The idea here is clear—God planned that a man and a woman would become one, be partners, share everything, build a life together, and please God.

Verse 15 says—"Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

God could foresee that by abandoning their Hebrew wives who worshipped Yahweh and marrying pagan women who worshipped a foreign god, the nation of Israel would ruin its call to be God's people here on earth. Why? It's

because it's always easier for pagan practice rather than for Yahweh worship to dominate in the family when both are present.

The Hebrew people were well aware of this reality in their nation's history. One of their greatest kings in history—Solomon—was well endowed with godliness, wisdom, and power. Yet when he chose to marry foreign wives, both the spirituality of his own family and that of the nation nosedived into gross idolatry. The pagan influence was so dominant that the generations who came after him could not continue to worship and obey God wholeheartedly. The 70 years of exile in Babylon was God's harsh answer to that loss of faithful devotion to Him.

Therefore Malachi warned the people to take heed and not to break faith (deal treacherously) with their wives. To break faith with them was to break faith with the covenant plan of God for their families and for the nation.

In v. 16, Malachi expresses God's sentiments towards the men breaking faith with their wives in the strongest of language—"I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."

Notice that God added something else as the object of His hatred in Malachi's time—when people covered themselves with violence. This word for violence is a word for social injustice. Social injustice came by way of the men replacing their vows of love and devotion to their wives with acts of social abuse (likely in the form of emotional and even physical violence). And God hated this as well. The "last straw" in this social violence (social unkindness) done against their wives was putting them away by way of divorcing them.

We today can also be guilty of being unkind to one another in the family with our attitudes, words, or actions.

Story is told of a husband named Jim and his wife named Emma.

One morning Emma woke up with a startled look. Her husband Jim asked what was the matter. She said, "I just had a dream that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine's Day. What do you think it means?"

"Well, I am not going to tell you now. You will know the answer tonight," Jim replied with a cheeky smile.

Emma was full of anticipation and could not wait for evening to come. That evening, Jim came home with a small package and gave it to his wife.

Delighted, Emma opened it—and found a book titled "How to Interpret Dreams".

My point is this—we today can also be guilty of being unkind to one another in the family with our attitudes, words, and actions, even in subtle and insensitive ways.

We need to learn to be more kind to our family with our attitudes, words, and actions lest we break faith with them and with God. I need to learn to practice loyalty to my family, to be more kind to my family with my attitudes, words, and actions lest I break faith with them and with God—e.g. my wife has often said to me, “Don’t talk to me like your wife. Talk to me like your sheep.”

The problem in Malachi’s time was two-fold:

- Men marrying pagan wives and that created the potential danger of Yahweh worship and obedience not being passed on for future generations to continue.
- Men divorcing their Hebrew wives and that set a potential bad example of family disunity for future generations to follow.

This certainly would pose a threat to the survival of not only the Hebrew family but the Hebrew nation as well.

So the message to the household of faith is clear—if you truly see how the marriage covenant fits God’s plan for His people, then you will marry within the faith and you will give all diligence to preserve that marriage. It is God’s desire for us to take marriage seriously.

Of course, no marriage is perfect. All marriages on earth will fall short of the ideal for sure. But we are always called back to the ideal, to the standard of God. For marriage to be “holy matrimony”, it must be pleasing to God. The husband and wife must truly see their marriage as service to God, especially in the raising up of godly offspring together. God desires godly offspring so that godly worship and obedience can be passed on to future generations, not just to begin and end with one generation.

Let me now list four quick thoughts on divorce so that we can better understand the heart of God on this matter:

1. God does hate divorce. We can’t water this down or try to act like He doesn’t. However, Scripture does allow divorce on a few grounds. While some who so divorced may feel relieved, God will always feel grieved. Reconciliation and not dissolution is always God’s intent.
2. God does not hate divorced people. Some may find that it is too late because they have lived through a failed marriage and there is no going back. For them, the message of God’s Word is clear—they must be sure their lives are now right with God, and that may mean acknowledging their share in the failure of that marriage and resolving to serve God now with devotion and obedience. To those who are

victims of divorce, God is saying—“Whatever the circumstances of your divorce were, I don’t hate you. I love you and I feel your pain.”

3. Divorce is not the only thing God hates. Sometimes we single out divorce and forget what God said in Prov. 6:16-19—“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” So let’s not be too quick to judge, especially if we ourselves are struggling with the “six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him”.
4. The church has not always been a healing community. In some instances, the church has been overly harsh on individuals who have been stung by divorce. At the same time, the church has not done enough to provide support to those who are going through the pain and trauma of divorce. For this shortcoming, the church needs to seek forgiveness from God Himself. For those who have been spared from the pain and trauma of divorce, their response should not be boasting that they are more righteous or judging others unkindly. Rather, it should be one of being grateful that God in His grace has blessed them with faithful and loving spouses.

## Conclusion

Let me close with four practical ways to protect our marriage covenant and be pleasing to God:

1. Take responsibility to grow spiritually. The greatest leadership challenge is not what’s going on outside me, but what’s going on inside me. You will not be the husband or wife God wants you to be unless you take responsibility to cultivate your spiritual life. Only an open, teachable person towards God and His Word can develop the characteristics needed in a good marriage partner.
2. Stay committed no matter what. God’s intention for marriage is that one man and one woman commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives to building up a godly home and to living in a relationship that fulfills and helps them become what God has intended them to be.
3. Think the best of the other. One of the best things to say when your husband or wife does something that makes you mad is this—“You are not wrong, just different.” Don’t make moral issues out of things that are just preferences. Cut each other some slack.
4. Be a servant. In our compare and compete society, we often fight to lead and be better than the other. We even carry this fighting to lead and to be better into the marriage relationship. And fighting marriages seldom last. One of the best ways to have a marriage that lasts is to desire to serve your spouse.

Malachi tells why sharing one faith in God can help deter breaking faith with Him.

- Sharing one faith in God helps to preserve godly worship and obedience.
- Sharing one faith in God helps to pass on godly worship and obedience.

We make the choice of faithful devotion to God by committing to faithful devotion in our marriage and family relationships. Husband faithfully devoted to wife and vice versa; parent faithfully devoted to child and vice versa; siblings faithfully devoted to one another.

God blesses faithful devotion. And this devotion begins first not in church, but in our respective homes. Strong Christian homes are the building blocks of a strong Christian witness in and through the church.

Let's seek the Lord to help us nurture faithful devotion to Him and to one another in our family, and even in our church. Amen!

### **Reflection Questions**

1. List and discuss two pluses for marrying in the Christian faith.
2. How can the Body of Christ minister to someone who has gone through the pain and trauma of divorce?