

Faithless to One Another?

Intro

In the Scriptures, sexuality and spirituality are always close.

God Our Creator and Father (v 10)

Malachi refers back to the original covenants God made with Moses.

Deut 32:3-6 I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation. Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?"

To be united to God through his love implies a love for his family. We break our relationship of unity with God when we break our covenant promises to one another.

Distinction and Communion/Union

Jesus' prayers in John flesh this out for us. We cannot be in close communion with God if we are not willing to be in close communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

John 15:12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 17:11 Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

But one man/one woman marriage is an even stronger picture of God's union with his Bride, the church. Malachi focuses on this central, crucial covenant—marriage. Husbands are breaking their marriage covenants by divorcing their Jewish wives to marry pagan women.

^{ESV} Ezra 9:2 For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost."

This sin is so repugnant to God that he breaks off his relationship with his people until they repent and change.

God Our Husband

God's First Complaint (vv 11-12)

Judah desecrates the *holy thing* that God loves.

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Malachi 2:10–16, Rebecca Jones

The word translated “sanctuary” in the ESV has a huge variety of translations: vessel, weapon, container, stuff, sanctuary, jewels, or perhaps even the male sexual organ.¹ Some take “sanctuary” to mean God’s people. Others suggest “holy seed” or “marriage.” In any case, it is definitely tied to the context— the men’s faithlessness to their wives is a desecration of something holy to God, for two reasons – they are abandoning their covenant wives, and they are marrying pagan women (“daughters of a foreign god”). Judah’s desecration is both physical and spiritual.

Social context

This period (around 460 BC) was a difficult time for the Jews who had come back to live in Israel

- They had high hopes for a Messiah and for God’s powerful presence to return to the temple. But the temple was a poorer version of the Solomon’s temple and Jerusalem was still in ruins.
- They were a small remnant living in an area about 20x25 miles, surrounded by pagan nations.
- Both the people and the priests were cutting corners in obeying Moses’ law because they had lost faith. The priests gave in to accepting road kill as acceptable sacrifices because if they didn’t, they would have nothing to eat. The people were happy with that solution.
- The economy was terrible and there were few ways to make a living.

So, the temptation to marry into wealthier non-Israelite families was great. It was a way to get work and privilege.

Holiness: A Moral State?

Holiness is usually thought of as a moral state. This is true (though for us, we can only be truly moral because Christ obeyed the law for us). In the Old Testament, all kinds of things that can’t be “moral” are called “holy” --consecrated for God’s service, set apart for a particular use or job. There are holy clothes, holy perfume, holy dishes, holy underwear – underwear can’t be moral! Our culture can’t understand why we make such a big deal out of marriage. This passage shows us both that God *does* make a big deal of marriage and *why* he makes a big deal of it. God has *set us apart in Christ* to be his “holy seed.” He has unified himself to his church as a man covenants to be faithful and unified to his wife. We are one with God by His Spirit. In marriage, husband and wife are one with each other –distinct as male and female, yet sharing in the image of God and thus equal and in union. We are one with our spouses in spirit and in flesh.

God’s Verdict

God will not accept any amount of “sacrifices” or formal worship for the men who have deserted their wives.

¹ ESV **1 Samuel 21:5** And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?"

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They are to be “cut off” – that is spiritually cast off from God’s covenant. It doesn’t seem that too many of them were thus punished publicly by corrupt priests, but of course, the more fearful punishment is being cut off from the people of God, as was Judas, for example.

The ESV translates this

Malachi 2:12 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!***

The NIV has:

^{NIV} **Malachi 2:12** *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.*

If “descendants” is the correct translation (the Hebrew says “any who wakes and answers”), then these would be the children born to those mixed marriages. We know that in and of itself, being a foreigner, even a foreigner with a doubtful past, does not preclude a person from becoming a part of God’s people.

Turn a page or two in your Bible to Matthew 1 and you find four such foreign, “shady” women in the line of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba!

But children raised in idolatry by foreigners are not likely to follow God’s laws or return to him. We also have God’s warning that our sins often follow our generations, even though God’s mercy is still amazing.

God’s Second Complaint (vv 13-14)

In verses 13-14, the prophet describes how God’s people are reacting to the fact that God is not responding to them and refuses to accept their sacrifices and offerings. They are incensed that God won’t receive them, even though they are “weeping and groaning,” which was a part of pagan worship, in which one had to work up a lather, shout and yell in order to make sure the gods would hear. The more emotional you were, the more likely the gods would answer you. We have only to think of Elijah’s contest with the priests of Baal.

1 Kings 18:27-29 *And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.*

Of course, marrying foreign, pagan women would bring all kinds of abominations into the home. As Doug Stuart puts it:

The pagan ways of Israel’s neighbors were the prime source of these abominations, against which they were warned firmly prior to their entrance into the promised land (Deut 18:10-13). Among such were idolatry, child sacrifice, various magical rites with sexual overtones (boiling a kid in its mother’s milk; sowing a field with two kinds of seed so as to ‘mate’ them), violations of basic family decency (e.g. temple prostitution, incest), and other degenerations that the Israelites were tempted to borrow from their neighbors against God’s will. (Stuart, 1332)

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The Israelites thought they could bring God out of his silence by using pagan worship techniques with enough emotional displays, wailing and groaning.

God the Witness

The Israelites aren't asking "How?" anymore. They now ask, "**Why** won't God accept our sacrifices?" Here God himself is the prosecutor and the witness against his people. He alone really understands their guilt. Because God has given marriage as his chosen picture to the world of his covenant love for us, marriage is a huge deal for him!

The men are breaking their marriage covenant. In Israel, you could divorce a wife under certain circumstances. In order to do so, the husband needed a "writ," which implies that the marriage itself was considered a formal contract/covenant.

In many places in the Scripture, God has mercy on women – even disobedient women – whose husbands or whose leaders have betrayed them.

Hosea 4:14 *I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.*

Here God is witness to the betrayal of the wives and his anger is aroused against the Israelites. He no longer receives their offerings.

Our Marriages (vv 15-16)

Malachi gets down to the individual level. Notice the lovely description of wives:

- The wife of your youth—very long term relationships. (In this culture, children were promised to each other very early and probably spent their childhoods knowing that they would eventually be married.)
- Companion, partner—Implies deep understanding, compassion, joy and friendship (all of these are echoes of our marriage to Christ)
- Covenantally bound—Rather than thinking of marriage as a constriction, we must realize that in its covenant promises, we have an amazing safety net. There's no way out but through – like having a baby. And once you're through, you are so glad you stuck it out! If you leave because of a fluctuation of feelings, you never learn the depth of true, sacrificial love and you will be likely to carry your faults on into the next relationship anyway.
- One in Flesh and Spirit—God made two sexes, creating them for each other, giving them union physically and spiritually. They remain distinct, yet unified. We cannot redefine ourselves according to our whims, our feelings, or what the culture tells us that marriage involves. Even Christians have slipped far from the faithfulness we should show in our marriages. The divorce rate is exactly the same in Christian marriages as in non-Christian marriages. This should not be so!

Godly Seed

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:16** *The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.*

- God's desire for children to be born into Christian marriages
- Only One Holy Seed

Not one married woman in this room would pretend her marriage was perfect. Hopefully, God has been faithful to us in those moments when we are quite convinced that our husband is not exactly fulfilling Ephesians 5 and in those moments when we know that we are not exactly giving him honor and respect!

God declares us holy, set apart.

God uses sinners to make others holy.

We are covered under the righteous robe of Christ, not under the robe of violence that a divorcing husband wraps us in (verse 16). Nonetheless we can be of help to our husbands – not breaking faith with them by belittling them, judging them in our hearts, or destroying their reputation with our words. May the Lord give all married women here the grace to be faithful, not to turn to pagan ways of worship, but to honor our marriages, which are “holy” and “loved by God.”

Singles, too, can honor the men God has given to help you – brothers and fathers in Christ – by respecting them, honoring them and encouraging them to hold fast to their covenant promises. God delights in the sacrifice of our lips, our bodies, our marriages, our children

So do not break faith with a loving heavenly Father – that will allow you, by His Spirit, to keep the faith in the Christian community and specifically in your marriages.

Resources

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Stuart, Doug, “Malachi,” *The Minor Prophets*, vol 3, McComiskey, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).