

Malachi 2:14
Breaking Faith With the Wrong Person
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Introduction

This morning we are going to continue our journey through the book of Malachi. We have been working through this third section in the book of Malachi which goes from 2:10-16. The primary issue that God has with the Israelites in this section is their faithlessness toward each other. As I have said before (and I will say it many more times), our sin (or faithlessness) against each other is ultimately sin (or faithlessness) against God himself. Last week we looked at 2:13-14, and what we saw was that the Israelite men were breaking faith with their wives by divorcing them in order to marry foreign, idol-worshipping women. The message last week was titled, “Broken for all the Wrong Reasons.” I titled it this because the Israelites should have been weeping over their sin in breaking faith with their wives and over the apparent absence of God, but they were not weeping over these things; rather they were weeping over the fact that God was not fulfilling their self-centered desires.

Malachi 2:14

This week we are going to continue on in this third section of the book of Malachi. Remember God’s primary issue with the Israelites in this passage is with the Israelite men and their faithlessness to their wives. God is lambasting these men for not being faithful to their wives, and what we are going to find is that their faithlessness against their wives was first and foremost faithlessness against God himself. This will be more clear as we move along. However, this morning I want us to notice that Malachi describes these Israelite wives in three ways: he refers to them as (1) *the wife of your youth*, (2) *your companion*, and (3) *your wife by covenant*.

Notice that Malachi describes these women in these terms in back-to-back rapid succession. All three of these descriptions are given in one verse. Notice that he doesn’t just refer to these women as their wives. In other words he does not say, “The Lord has been a witness between you and your wife” No! Also, he does not just say, “I have been a witness between you and the wife of your youth,” period. No, he wants them to know exactly who they have been faithless to, and so he describes their wives in these three ways in order excite their minds, to help them understand exactly who it is that they have broken faith with. So he heaps up three descriptions so that they might see clearly that they have broken faith with the wrong person.

Let me illustrate: When I was growing up my parents were always taking people in to our house. Our house, for all intents and purposes, was an informal half-way house. I literally cannot remember a time when we didn’t have someone living with us. It was never just the five of us. My parents took in recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, those in financial distress, those recovering from divorce, troubled teens, and anyone else who needed a place to lay their head. They really felt that God had called them to serve the down and outs. Well, I remember one of the guys who stayed with us (I will leave his name anonymous). He had an unusual drug addiction and always in and out of jail. He would come to my parents when he was ready to clean up his life and they would take

him in. Usually he would stay with us for a few months, celebrate his sobriety, and then as soon as he was able he would get a job; however after he would get his first pay check he would fall back into his old ways and we wouldn't hear from him again for a few months. Well, a few months later we would get a phone call from him telling us how bad he messed up, how he had gotten in trouble and had to spend a month or two in jail. He then would express his desire to get clean and so my parents would invite him back to our house. This literally happened four or five times. My parents knew that if they were his only safe haven. Apart from them he had no home and no food—without them he was helpless not to mention homeless. Absolutely everyone in our town saw him as an outcast and my parents even received flack from many of the folks at our church because they would bring him to church with them. My parents were the only people who loved him enough to help him back up when he had fallen; everyone else wanted nothing to do with him.

Well, the last time he stayed with us, as usual after he got a job and received his first pay check, he left. This time, however, he came back to our house when he knew that we weren't going to be home in order to pick up his stuff, and while he was getting his stuff he decided to steal some of our stuff on his way out the door. Isn't that amazing? My parents were the only people he had to pick him up when he had fallen down. They were the only ones who had not completely rejected him as a good-for-nothing loser. Of all the people in the world that this man would steal from you would think that my parents would have been last on his list. To him my parents were not just like the man working behind the counter at the local hardware store; to him my parents were not even just friends, they were all he had—everyone else had completely rejected him—my parents were the only one's there to help him up when he had fallen down, and here he is stealing their stuff!

This is the idea that God is trying to get across through Malachi. These Israelite men are not merely breaking faith with old Darryl who works behind the counter at the liquor store; they are not just breaking faith with their cousin's, boyfriend's, mother's, uncle's, best friend's dog. He wants them to know who they are breaking faith with. Do you remember what I said a few weeks ago: "It is one thing to lie and rip the IRS off (as sinful as lying is), it is another to lie and rip your brother off; it is one thing to slash your ex-girlfriend's boyfriend's tires (as sinful as being vindictive is), it is another to slash your mother's tires." And to show them exactly who it is that they are breaking faith with, he reminds them with three descriptions who their wives were.

In essence, he is calling attention to who their wives are so that they might realize that their wives ought to be the last person on the face of the planet that they should be breaking faith with. He is trying to show them that if anything they ought to be pursuing loving intimacy, companionship, and faithfulness first and foremost to their wives. No one should play second fiddle to your wives, except for Jesus and his bride. *And the three descriptions he gives in vs. 14 are purposed to excite in their minds the urgency of intentionally pursuing loving faithfulness, intimacy, and companionship first and foremost with their wives.* Let's take a look at each description separately. After we look at these three statements I will close with a few words of admonition.

(1) The Wife of Your Youth

First, he describes their wives specifically as “the wife of your youth.” What did Malachi mean by this phrase? First of all, it is important to know that Malachi is not the only one who refers to a man’s wife in this way. Turn with me to Proverbs 5:15-20:

¹⁵Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. ¹⁶Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹a lovely deer, a graceful doe... be intoxicated always in her love. ²⁰Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

Solomon is here giving wise advice in regard to fighting against the lure and temptation of following after the harlot, the adulteress woman. Researches say that about 50% of all professing Christian men struggle with pornography. Do you want to know one of the ways you fight against this temptation? Well, look at the advice of Solomon. What is his advice? Be pleased with the wife of your youth! One of the best ways to fight sexual pleasure is to seek it out with your wife. God has given you desires that are meant to be fulfilled in the context of marriage. It seems from this passage that this phrase “the wife of your youth” has to do with life giving, youthful love. In other words, when Malachi called her ‘the wife of your youth’ he had in mind the fact that this woman that you are breaking faith with is no ordinary woman, she is the one that God has ordained to help you, to please you, and to serve you. She is no mere woman; she is a treasure, a jewel from God.

It is also true that women married young. Many have suggested that Mary was still in her teens when she was betrothed to be married to Joseph. Women did marry young. Thus, what Malachi could have in mind when he refers to their wives as ‘the wife of your youth’ is that this is the one with whom you have shared your whole life. You have given her all of yourself and she has given you all of herself. She is the wife of your youth.

(2) Your Companion

Second, he does not merely say, “I have been witness between you and your wife.” No he says, “I have been witness between you and the wife of your youth... she is your companion.” This word *companion* can also be translated as ‘partner’ and it literally means, “the one to whom you are united/with whom you are joined together.” In other words, the idea of your wife being your companion does not just have to do with her being your good buddy. It has to do with being bound together, united. If you remember a few weeks ago we looked at 2 Corinthians 6:14, “do not be bound together with unbelievers.” It has this same sort of an idea. Your wife is the one with whom you have become bound.

Ultimately this carries with it the idea of the one flesh union between a husband and a wife as described in Genesis 2:18, 21-24.

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;^(A) I will make him a helper fit for him."

²¹*So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.* ²²*And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.* ²³*Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."* ²⁴*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

What we see here is the idea of leaving and cleaving. The man is to leave his father and mother and is to cleave (hold fast) to his wife. Notice the word *and* in the next part of the verse. The man is to leave and cleave *and* they shall become one flesh. We see this very idea in the next verse in Malachi 2:15:

¹⁵*Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?*

Once again Malachi's purpose here is to describe their wives so that these Israelite men might realize who it is that they have broken faith with. Your wife is no ordinary woman, she is the one with whom you have become one flesh. And, as I have said a million times, she has become one flesh with you so much so that Paul actually suggests that you are mistreating yourself when you mistreat your wife (Ephesians 5:28-31). In other words, what Malachi is trying to say is that your wife ought to be the last person the face of the planet that you should break faith with.

(3) Your Wife by Covenant

Lastly, he describes their wives as 'your wife by covenant.' The context makes it quite clear that Malachi has in mind the marriage covenant. The Old Testament does not explain the nature of the covenant that a man was to make with his wife. The Old Testament doesn't have much to say about the nuts and bolts of marriage covenants. However, we do know from Jesus' words in Matthew 19 that when a man entered into a covenantal relationship with a woman, called marriage, it was to be *for life*. After all, he said, "What God has brought together, let not man separate." From this we can see that the covenant that a man made with his wife was binding, permanent, and virtually unconditional.

To look into things a bit further it would be helpful to know what a marriage covenant is. A marriage covenant, for all intents and purposes, is a binding agreement that two people mutually make by sharing unconditional vows in the sight of God. A vow is a promise or pledge that a man and a woman make to each other in the sight and presence of God affirming their determination to love each other and be to be sacrificially committed to each other until death do us part. Really the vows are the heart of the covenant, they are the covenant stipulations. In essence when a man says his vows to his wife at the altar he is saying, "I am entering into this binding relationship (covenant) with you and this will be my and delightful duty in this binding relationship." Take a look at these sample traditional wedding vows.

I, (Bride/Groom), take you (Groom/Bride), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in

sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part.

In essence, here in Malachi 2:14 God refers to her as ‘your wife by covenant’ because he wants to strike fear into the heart of these Israelite men who are flippantly breaking the covenantal vows that they made to their wives in the presence of God. Do you remember what Solomon said in the book of Ecclesiastes 5:5-6: “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?” Certainly this is different than a marriage vow, but the idea of pledging is the same. The ultimate idea here is that God has been witness between you and the wife of your youth. He was witness to the covenant that the Israelite men had made with their wives and now he stands as witness to their lack of faithfulness to that same covenant. My spin on Ecclesiastes 5:5-6: “Do not be surprised when God destroys the work of your hands when you are not faithful in fulfilling the promises you have made before him.”

Your wife is no ordinary woman. No, she is your wife by covenant. She is the one with whom you have covenanted before God. This is the woman whom you vowed to be faithful to and to love until death do you part. And although you made those vows to the woman, you made them in the presence of God. Ultimately, when you made your covenant vows to your wife, you were making them to God as well: promising to him that you were going to be faithful to his daughter. The last person that you want to break faith with is the one whom you vowed to be faithful to till death do us part in the presence of God. God was witness to the covenant that they made and he was witness to the same covenant that they broke. Kristal and I took our vows seriously—don’t say them unless you mean them because they are ultimately said in the presence of God; he stands as witness.

Application

I see two applications to this passage. Ultimately God describes their wives in these three ways because he wants to show the Israelites that their wives are not just any old woman, their wives are (1) the wife of your youth, (2) your companion, and (3) your wife by covenant. In essence, he is grabbing them by the ears and saying, “Look at her! Consider who she is! She is no mere woman. She is my gift to you, the one with whom you have become one flesh, the one with whom you have covenanted before me.” God wants these Israelites to realize how urgent and intentional they should be about being faithful to their wives. And what we see is that instead of being urgent and intentional about being faithful to their wives they are breaking faith with them, trashing their side of the covenant that they made with them.

Sometimes we husbands need to take a second and remind ourselves of who our wives are (of who she is). That woman standing before the mirror is not just any ol’ woman; she is God’s gift to me, my partner, my wife by covenant. We need to remind ourselves so that we are not lackadaisical about serving, loving, and honoring her.

Priority of Service

Although your first and foremost allegiance ought to be to Jesus and his bride, your second allegiance ought to be your wives. All other allegiances and relationships ought to be subservient to your relationship with your wife. You ought to be more intentional and urgent to serve, love, cherish, and respect your wives than any other person on the face of the planet. There is no other person with whom you share more with. The covenant that you entered with your wife is deeper and more binding than any other relationship that you can enter in this realm.

How many of you in here know someone in your extended family who treats his wife like the dirt under his feet? He is rude to her, short with her, and really doesn't give her much respect at all? I am sure that we can all think of someone. The interesting thing is that he always comes to the family reunion with a smile on his face, and is kind and cordial to all present. He gives hugs, shakes hands, and inquires inquisitively about the lives of those at the reunion. And you sit there and wonder, "Why is he so kind to me and yet so rude to his wife? I am not the wife of his youth, the one he has become one flesh with, and we certainly haven't covenanted before God." Why is he so intolerant with her and so kind to me? And the strangest thing is when such men are kind to strangers whom they know they will never see again.

Let me ask you a question, both men and women, "Are you more intentional about pleasing, honoring, and serving your spouse above any and every person on the face of the planet?" Do you speak with more patience, grace, and respect when you speak to others than when you speak to your wife? If so, you are a hypocrite. Do you take more interest in me and my life than you do in your wife's? If so, you are a hypocrite. I have not become one flesh with you, you have not covenanted with me before God. How intentional and urgent are you to serve and love your spouse?

A Word to Mothers

I know that we are to honor mothers on mother's day; however I have a challenge for you mothers. The number one person in your life, apart from Jesus Christ, ought not be your kids, it ought to be your husband. I am sure that most of us here have heard the saying, "There is no love like a mother's love." Although this may be true in a sense, it is often times horribly maligned. You have not become one flesh with your kids, you have not covenanted before God with them. Don't get me wrong, you ought to serve them and give yourself for them, but they are to come second to their Daddy. They ought to know very loud and clear that they are second to their Daddy. Paul Washer one time posed a challenge. If your wife and your child were to fall out of a boat and it was obvious that you were not going to be able to save both and they were the same distance from the boat, which would you save? In essence, he said (with my twist), "You had better dive over your son to save your wife." Your kids ought to know that they are not at the center of your universe. They need to know that Jesus is at the center of their universe, then daddy, and then them.

This does not mean that you love your kids less, it just means that you keep your priorities straight. Mothers, do you expend yourself just as much to serve and love your husband as you do to serve and love your kids? Fathers, do you expend yourself to excel at serving and loving your wife as you do to excel at work or at golf?

Mothers, the best way to love your kids is to put their daddy before them. Think about an air plane. Air planes have a pilot (daddy), a co-pilot (mommy), and passengers

(kids). The objective of the pilot and co-pilot is to successfully and safely fly the plane from point a to point b while keeping all of the passengers comfortable and safe. The purpose of the co-pilot is to assist the pilot in this mission. Ultimately, the Pilot and the Co-pilot have the welfare of their passengers at the top of their list. However, imagine if the co-pilot were to leave the cock pit to go out and hang out with the passengers out of a deep-seated love and affection for them. What would happen? Well, I can tell you that when I have flown, and I have flown quite a bit, I feel most safe and secure when I never see the faces of the pilot and co-pilot. Why, because if I never see their faces that means that they are up front in the cock pit working as a team to keep me safe as we fly from point a to point b! The pilot and the co-pilot have to keep each other as their first priority, and in so doing they successfully and safely serve their passengers. This is just how it is in the home.

I grew up in an average home. My parents, as all parents, had their ups and downs. I can attest to the fact that the times when my parents were most committed to each other, joyfully serving each other were the times when I felt the most secure. The times when they were struggling with each other were the times when I felt the least secure. Nothing will make your kids more insecure than when you make them and their desires your greatest priority. The more you make daddy your priority, the more they will know your love for them, the more secure they will be, the happier they will be.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Malachi is describing the Israelite wives in three different ways to show them how faithless they had become. If they had become so faithless that they had begun to break faith with their very wives, indeed they have hit rock bottom—they were being faithless to the very ones that they should have been pursuing above all (second only to Christ). He describes their wives as ‘the wife of your youth’ and ‘your companion’ to excite in them the wonderful gift that God had given them in their wives so that they might realize the great mistake that they were making, and he then described their wives as ‘your wife by covenant’ to excite fear in the men so as to realize that their breaking faith with their wives was ultimately an offense against God himself. After all, God was witness to the marriage covenants that they had made.

Your wife is no ordinary woman, she is the *wife of your youth*; the gift that God has given you to help you, satisfy you, please you, and serve you. Do you treat your wives like a treasure? Joyfully and fearfully serve your wives. Your spouse ought to be your second priority only to Jesus. You ought to be seeking to serve, love, and honor them, pursuing a relationship with them above all other.