

Questioning God's Discipline

A Study of Malachi 2:10-16

Characteristic of Completeness: Family Living

Big Idea: Guard your thoughts.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 2:24; 1 Kings 11:1-2; Ezra 9:1-2; Nehemiah 12:23-37; Matthew 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:12; 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 10:5; Ephesians 5:29; 1 Peter 3:7

Introduction:

- A. (Show video, "Dear Jane," here.)
- B. Divorce is very sensitive and painful subject. Many of you here this morning have experienced or are experiencing the heartache of divorce first hand, whether as a spouse or a child or a parent or a sibling. I don't need to tell you how hurtful it can be.
- C. Today, we're going to study a passage from the Bible that relates to divorce—mostly how to avoid it. In fact, the passage is one of the most revealing passages on divorce in the entire Old Testament. The passage is ► Malachi 2:10-16. This text has something important to say about how to protect marriage and families from the pain of divorce. So our Characteristic of Completeness for the week is ► Family Living.
- D. My aim this morning is *not* to reopen old wounds. It is *not* to make you feel bad about divorces you've already had or are going through. It is *not* to try to sort out if and when divorce may be justified, and sometimes I believe it is.

Instead, I want to explore some ways to help prevent divorce on the thinking that, if there are healthy ways to preserve marriage, they are worth pursuing. If divorce is a symptom of a diseased relationship, then I want to focus on preventing the disease, not on treating the symptom.

- E. Some of you may be thinking, "This doesn't apply to me because I'm happily married." I'm happy for you. But keep in mind just about everybody who is divorced thought they were happily married at one time. The relational disease leading to divorce can strike anyone, perhaps especially those who think it can't.

Some of you may be thinking, "This doesn't relate to me because I'm not married." Well, perhaps one day you will be. And we're going to see that healthy ways to preserve marriage include important things you can do as a single person before marriage is even on your radar.

Moreover, if you are a believer in Jesus, you belong to a community of faith that includes married people—people who may need encouragement and support from you in their situation.

So our text has much broader application than it may seem at first.

- F. The prophet Malachi is writing to the people of Israel who had returned to their homeland after having spent some seventy years in Babylonian exile. During the Israelites' seventy-year absence from their land, some foreigners who worshipped foreign gods came in and settled.

After returning from exile to their homeland, many men of Israel became smitten with the foreign femmes they discovered there—so smitten that they divorced their Jewish wives and married the foreign women.¹ The language of the text suggests that many of the men were trading in their older domestic brides in favor of newer foreign models.² Older men dumping their wives for younger women. It's not just a modern phenomenon; it was happening some 2,500 years ago among God's people.

In the wake of this widespread divorce and remarriage, the men kept bringing their worship offerings to the Lord's altar, expecting that God would bless them for it. But the Lord was not blessing them. Instead, they experienced His discipline in the form of great hardship.³ So much hardship, in fact, that they brought offerings to the Lord with tears and weeping and groaning, pleading with the Lord to reverse their fortunes. They questioned God's discipline: "Why does He not accept our offering with favor?" They were apparently oblivious to the fact that their hardship was a form of discipline for their own sin. Remember, the people of Israel were under the Mosaic Covenant—an agreement between God and Israel in which God promised blessings for obedience and discipline for disobedience.

And so, Malachi speaks into this situation. He's addressing men because it was primarily their problem, and in that culture, it was the prerogative of the husband to initiate divorce.⁴ Sometimes Malachi refers to the men of Israel by the name, "Judah," which is the name of their homeland. Other times he addresses them using the name, "Jacob," which is the name of their ancestor. He refers to the foreign women collectively as the "daughter of a foreign god." As I read the text, notice how many times Malachi uses the term, "faithless." Beginning in ► Malachi 2:10, the prophet says:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we ► faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? ► 11 Judah has been ► faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ► 12 May the

¹ Ezra 9:1-2, 10-12; Nehemiah 12:23-27.

² Suggesting by the phrase "the wife of your youth." See Robert L. Alden, "Malachi," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 717.

³ Probably including crop failure, suggested by Malachi 3:10-12.

⁴ Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, eds. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 280.

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! ► 13 And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ► 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been ► faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ► 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be ► faithless to the wife of your youth. ► 16 "For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be ► faithless."

- I. In this text, Malachi touches on at least ► six reasons why it was wrong for the men of Israel to divorce and remarry foreign women. I want to briefly list these reasons before moving on to Malachi's prescription for protecting marriage.
 - A. Here's the ► first reason: Wrongfully seeking divorce is "faithless." Five times in our text Malachi uses the term "faithless" in association with divorce.⁵ The original Hebrew term describes "one who does not honor an agreement."⁶ It is the breaking of a vow. It is a form of betrayal that is sometimes translated by the English word, "treacherous."

I want you to remember that Malachi has in mind husbands who had wrongfully divorced their wives without justification. They had discarded and degraded their first wives. The term, "faithless" fits these men, but it would be hard to pin it on their ex-wives who had remained faithful. So, it is quite possible to be divorced and not be the one who was "faithless."
 - B. Here's the ► second reason: Mixed marriages invite trouble. I'm talking about *spiritually* mixed marriages, where a believer marries an unbeliever.
 1. In ► Verse 11, Malachi decries the marriage of some of his brethren to foreign wives who worship foreign gods because such mixed marriages were strictly forbidden in the Mosaic Law.⁷ The reason is that unbelieving spouses can turn the hearts of their believing partners away from God.

⁵ "Faithless" occurs in Verses 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16.

⁶ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "בגד," (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

⁷ Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4.

2. It happened thousands of years ago to the wisest person on earth: Solomon, whose heart was turned away from God by his unbelieving wives.⁸ And it still happens today because the principle still ► holds:

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 15:33 . . . “Bad company ruins good morals.”

3. That’s why mixed marriages continue to be discouraged in the New Testament. In ► 2 Corinthians 6:14, it says,

^{ESV} 2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. . .

A mixed marriage is never a basis for divorce, but it is certainly a basis for not getting married in the first place because mixed marriages invite trouble.⁹

- C. Here’s the ► third reason: You can’t mistreat your wife and expect to have a good relationship with God. In ► Verses 13-14, Malachi says to the offending husbands:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:13 . . . You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless . . .

The Lord did not accept the worship of these husbands, even when it was offered fervently “with tears, with weeping and groaning.” God did not bless them because they had been faithless to their wives. When they mistreated their wives, it adversely affected their relationship with God.

A similar idea is reflected in the New Testament in ► 1 Peter 3:7, where it says,

^{ESV} 1 Peter 3:7 . . . husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor . . . so that your prayers may not be hindered.

This makes sense. My daughter, Candace, is married to Nathanael. As far as I know, Nathanael has been a great husband. And so, if he were to ask me for a favor, I would do whatever I could. But if Nathanael were to continually abuse my daughter, his requests for my favor would definitely be “hindered.”

- D. Here’s the ► fourth reason: Divorce violates the intended permanence of marriage. In ► Genesis 2:24, it says,

⁸ 1 Kings 11:1-2.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:12.

^{ESV} Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The “one-flesh” idea is one of permanence. Marriage is intended to be indivisible. I think that’s Malachi’s point when he asks the rhetorical question in ► Verse 15 of our text:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:15 Did he [God] not make them [the married couple] one . . . ?

The unspoken, but unmistakable answer is yes, God did make the two into one. Jesus affirms it in ► Matthew 19:6:

^{ESV} Matthew 19:6 “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

- E. Here’s the ► fifth reason: Forsaking one marriage for a mixed one adversely affects the rearing of godly children. In ► Verse 15, Malachi asks,

^{ESV} Malachi 2:15 Did he not make them one . . . ?

The answer is: Yes He did; in marriage the two become one. Then Malachi asks a follow-up ► question:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:15 . . . And what was the one God seeking? . . .

That is to say, why did God create marriage in which two people become one? What was He after? Malachi answers his own question with at least ► one reason:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:15 . . . Godly offspring.

God wants marriage to produce godly offspring. Not just offspring, but *godly* offspring. I think this refers to children who follow God.¹⁰ If, as a believer, I were to dump my believing wife for the sake of some younger unbelieving one, it’s not likely to encourage my children to follow God, especially if they are very young.

- F. Here’s the ► sixth and final reason: God is strongly against divorce. In fact, God seems to associate divorce with violence in ► Verse 16, where it says,

^{ESV} Malachi 2:16 “For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with ► violence, says the LORD of hosts. . . .”

The Hebrew here is difficult to translate because of its ambiguity. As such, some translations, such as the *English Standard Version* and *Holman Christian Standard*

¹⁰ Genesis 17:7.

Bible, take the “the man” to be the one who hates his wife in the divorce. Other translations, such as the *New American Standard Bible* and the *New King James Version* take God to be the one who hates and render it “God hates divorce.” Either way, it seems clear that God feels strongly about divorce, associating it ► with violence, casting the husbands of Israel as abusers.

- G. So you see, Malachi gives at ► least six reasons why the men of Israel should preserve their marriages and not chase the foreign women: 1) Wrongfully seeking divorce is faithless; 2) mixed marriages invite trouble; 3) you can’t mistreat your wife and expect to have a good relationship with God; 4) divorce violates the intended permanence of marriage; 5) forsaking one marriage for a mixed one adversely affects the rearing of godly children; and 6) God is strongly against divorce.
- II. Malachi ► then moves from the reasons why the men of Judah shouldn’t divorce and remarry to the primary way they can protect their marriages: He tells them to “guard yourselves in your spirit.”

He says it first in ► Verse 15:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:15 . . . So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

He repeats it for emphasis in ► Verse 16:

^{ESV} Malachi 2:16 “. . . So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

- A. The Hebrew term for ► “guard” means “to exercise great care over,” and “expresses the careful attention to be paid to the obligations of a covenant . . .”¹¹
- B. The Hebrew term for ► “spirit” describes “the entire immaterial consciousness of man.”¹² The basic idea, then, is to guard your thoughts. Believing husbands should guard their thoughts toward their wives so that they will not mentally move in the direction of faithlessness.

A similar idea is expressed by the Apostle Paul in ► 2 Corinthians 10:5, where he says,

^{ESV} 2 Corinthians 10:5 . . . take every thought captive to obey Christ

- C. So, the big idea of this sermon is ► this, as it relates to protecting marriage: Guard your thoughts. Believing husbands should guard their thoughts toward their wives so that they will not mentally move in the direction of faithlessness.

¹¹ TWOT, s.v. “שָׁמַר.”

¹² TWOT, s.v. “רוּחַ.”

D. How in the world do you guard your thoughts? Well, ► the reasons why it was wrong for the Israelites to divorce and remarry can help us think about how to guard our thoughts.

1. For example, ► if wrongfully seeking divorce is faithless, if it is the breaking of a vow, maybe we could think about what doing the opposite would look like. What would be the opposite of breaking a vow? Wouldn't the opposite be to affirm a vow?

Noted author, Jerry Jenkins, has decided to guard his thoughts by regularly and creatively reiterating his wedding vows to his wife.¹³ He says, "It may be naïve to think that people would remain true to their vows just by repeating them frequently, but who knows? At least couples might come to understand what they said in a ceremony before God, friends, and spouse."¹⁴

This week, perhaps you could in some way reaffirm your vows to your spouse.

2. Now let's think about ► the second reason. If mixed marriages invite trouble, how could you guard your thoughts against this? Well, as a single person, you could decide right now that you're not going to put yourself in a position where you might be tempted to marry an unbeliever. Maybe that means you decide not to date anyone who does not believe and follow Christ.
3. How about ► the third reason? If you can't mistreat your wife and expect to have a good relationship with God, then what would be the opposite of mistreating her? It could include a lot of things, but I suspect there is one way that many men secretly mistreat their wives and they don't even think of it as mistreatment. It's pornography.

If you don't think of it as mistreatment, just ask your wife, "Hey honey, mind if I satisfy myself by fantasizing about other women because you're just not enough for me?" See what she says.

This applies to singles, too. Singles who use porn are, in effect, mistreating their future spouses. They are training themselves to be self-absorbed, to have a degrading view of sexual partners, to replay stored images that often haunt relationships.

Guarding your thoughts would certainly include avoiding porn.

4. And how about ► the fourth reason? If divorce violates the intended permanence or oneness of marriage, how could we preserve the oneness?

¹³ Jerry B. Jenkins, *Loving Your Marriage Enough To Protect It*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, 1993), 109.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Let me read you three entries from my personal journal from 1994, spaced several weeks apart, as I tried to apply our text from Malachi.

Text: Malachi 2:14-16

Principle: Believing husbands should guard their thoughts toward their wives so that they will not mentally move in the direction of divorce.

Application: I will be careful not to harbor negative, divisive feelings toward my wife; rather, I will concentrate on loving her and operating as a unit.

Tuesday, October 4, 1994: At 2:35PM in my bedroom, I was listening to my wife Cathy share with me her concerns about our daughter. Our 14-year-old daughter Candace had undergone neurosurgery about two weeks earlier and was feeling some discomfort. Since the surgery, Cathy had repeatedly come to me to discuss her worries about the situation. She thought that something had not gone right with the surgery. I had reached a point of irritation, thinking that Cathy should trust God more and worry less. I was just about to launch into a lecture when I remembered Malachi 2:14-16: Guard your thoughts, seek unity. As a result, I did not lecture; rather, I tried to listen attentively to her cares, and we prayed together.

Friday, October 28, 1994: At 9:30AM in a hotel room I was again talking to my wife. My daughter's post-surgery discomfort had worsened and, at my wife's urging, we had been to several doctors to check her out in the preceding two weeks; all had assured us that her discomfort was unrelated to her earlier surgery. We had another doctor's appointment that day to have an easy, painless test performed. Cathy was tired and asked me to take Candace to the doctor without her. I was way behind in my homework, and was scheduled to preach in two days at the church that had just hired me. I thought Cathy was wimping out on me and was being insensitive to my situation. I was about to tell her so, when I remembered Malachi 2:14-16: Guard your thoughts, seek unity. I prayed for patience, and agreed to take Candace to the doctor.

Sunday, November 20, 1994: Being careful not to harbor or act upon negative feelings about my wife helped me to be sensitive, and I learned a big lesson as a by-product. In yielding to and being sensitive to my wife's concern about my daughter, we finally discovered what Cathy had felt all along, in spite of doctors' conclusions to the contrary: My daughter had contracted an infection

from the previous surgery! It has become very clear to me God designed Cathy and me to operate as a unit, and I should respect that.

5. Now, how about ► the fifth reason? If forsaking one marriage for a mixed one adversely affects the rearing of godly children, how could we guard our thoughts against that?

Well, perhaps we could guard our thoughts by considering the influence of our marriage relationship on our children. What are we teaching them?

Guarding our thoughts could include a recognition that marriage is far more than finding somebody who can light your fire and putting her under contract to do that. Marriage is a responsibility that includes the responsibility to raise children if you have them.

Perhaps guarding our thoughts could include regularly asking our spouse the following question: Are we modeling to our children the kind of relationship we'd like them to have with their spouse?

6. And what about ► the sixth reason? If God is strongly against divorce, and in the case of the men of Israel, He even considered it a violent, abusive act, then how could we guard our thoughts against it? Well, what would be the opposite of being violently abusive? Wouldn't it be to protect? Indeed, Ephesians 5:29 calls husbands to protect their wives.¹⁵

The protection is of the whole person, not just the physical. To protect is to guard against harm of any kind: physical, relational, emotional, spiritual. It could involve protecting your wife from the abuse or manipulation of someone else.

So, perhaps one way to guard our thoughts would be to ask our wives a simple question: On a scale of zero to ten, to what extent do you feel protected by me? And whatever her answer is, then we could ask: What could I do to move it closer to ten?

Conclusion:

I'd like ► to wrap up this message by providing a great modern example of a husband who would be the opposite of the Israelite husbands who dumped their wives. I can't read anybody's mind, but it sure seems like this guy did a good job of guarding his thoughts.

On a bookshelf in my office is a book titled, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*. It's written by a man named Robertson McQuilkin, a godly man who has written other books as well. He

¹⁵ The Greek term for "cherishes" describes protection. The word is used of a hen keeping her newly hatched chicks warm.

and his wife Muriel served as missionaries to Japan from 1956 to 1968. Then from 1968 to 1990, Robertson McQuilkin served as president and professor of Columbia Bible College and Seminary.

By his credentials you might think he is one of those theological eraser heads. And, maybe he is; I don't know. But, I do know one thing. Robertson McQuilkin was not faithless to the wife of his youth. In the late 70's and then all through the 80's he cared for his wife who had Alzheimer's disease. Then, in 1990 he decided that he could no longer continue as president of Columbia. He resigned to take care of Muriel full time. Listen to the words he spoke in addressing the staff and student body of Columbia upon his resignation.

(Play ► video, "McQuilkin," [here](#).)

Guard your thoughts. Guard your thoughts toward your spouse so that you will not mentally move in the direction of faithlessness. Guard your thoughts.