

The Lord is Witness Malachi 2:10-16

Introduction

We come now to the center section of Malachi's prophecy. The prophet has made clear the infidelity and hypocrisy of the Jews even after their return from exile in Babylon. They have despised God's special love for them (1:2-1:5). They, led by the priests, have despised God's name and profaned His altar, such that God has said He has no pleasure in them (1:6-2:2). The priests have betrayed the covenant of life and peace God made with Levi and have caused the people to stumble along with them (2:3-9). At the center of the prophecy, the Lord adds charges against His people that also summarize or encapsulate everything He has brought against them thus far.

Summary and Outlines of the Text

This center of the chiasm of Malachi contains two main charges against Judah (representing the people). He has committed an abomination in marrying "the daughter of a foreign god" (vs. 10-12). Related, he also has mistreated and divorced the wife of his youth (vs. 13-16). And, again, this section itself can be seen as a chiasm:

A – Judah's treachery to the marriage covenant (vs. 10-11).

B – God will cut them off (from the future) in their hypocrisy (v. 12).

C – The Lord will not acknowledge the offering because He is witness to the marriage covenant (v. 13-14).

B¹ – God designed marriage to produce godly seed (v. 15).

A¹ – God hates the treachery to the marriage covenant (v. 16).

There is also another possible chiasm in vs. 13-16.

A – Judah has covered the Lord's altar with tears; God does not receive the offering (v. 13).

B – Judah has dealt treacherously with the wife of his youth (v. 14).

C – The Lord instituted marriage because He seeks a godly seed (v. 15a).

B¹ – Let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth (v. 15b).

A¹ – The Lord hates divorce; it covers marriage with violence (v. 16).

Idolatrous Infidelity (vs. 10-12)

Malachi's audience has one Father and one God who created them (v. 10; cf. Ex. 4:22, Is. 43:1). It is this God who has established what marriage is and what it is for (v. 15). God created man male and female and brought the first man and the first woman together in the covenant of marriage, defining His institution and setting the standard for the world (Matt. 19:4-6). Marriage is and must be what it is because of what God has said. Any attempt to twist or redefine this institution is a direct assault on God because it is the foundational building block of His kingdom. It is a union which He joins together.

Malachi accuses Judah of committing covenantal treachery and an abomination: he has married the daughter of a foreign god (v. 11). Israel's history was plagued with intermarrying with the pagan nations which led to their idolatry (cf. Deut. 7:3-4, 31:16; Num. 25, 31:16; 1 Kings 11:1-4). After God had graciously delivered the remnant out of exile in Babylon, the people again turned to intermarry with the pagans (Ezra 9-10, Neh.

13:23ff). Malachi rebukes Judah for his return to idolatrous infidelity. He pleads God to cut them off from the covenant, particularly because they do this abomination while seeking to appease God with their offerings (v. 12). While marriage is a good, it ought not be pursued if it will lead to idolatry or apostasy (2 Cor. 6:14). The love and commitment to a husband or wife should never usurp one's love and commitment to God. In fact, within marriage, the best way to love your husband or your wife is to love Christ more.

Covering and Covenant Breaking

Malachi says that the Lord disregards Judah's offerings because of the tears which cover the altar (v. 13). Presumably, these are the tears of the wives that the Jews put away in their pursuit of the pagan women (cf. Ezra 10:1). Those women that have been dealt with treacherously have cried out to the Lord, and He is witness to their marriage covenants (v. 14). Because of the way they have dealt with their wives, the Lord's ears are deafened to the husbands (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). They have also covered their garments (euphemism for marriage – cf. Ruth 3:9, Ezek. 16:8) with violence. They have ripped apart what God had joined together. The covenant of marriage is not something people may enter into lightly because the Lord is witness to it. Marriage is His institution, and so He declares that He hates divorce (v. 16). It points to and is often a product of the greater infidelity towards Him. In your marriage, in your conflicts and resolutions and joys and sorrows, of what spirit are you (v. 15, 16)? Does your marriage reflect Christ and His church (Eph. 5:23)? Does it reflect the workings of the Holy Spirit in your hearts? Or is your spirit at odds with the Spirit? Are you at odds with God in your marriage? Take heed that you do not deal treacherously, not just with your spouse, but with God as well.

The Godly Seed

God established marriage ("made them one") because He "seeks a godly seed" (v. 15). Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and multiply even before the Fall (Gen. 1:28). Before sin, the earth would have been filled with godly offspring. After the Fall, this goal has not changed. While covenant disobedience (whether with God or in marriage) magnifies curses, covenant obedience magnifies blessings, and far more than the magnified curses (Deut. 5:9-10). God continues to seek godly offspring, and He will until the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). His name will be magnified in all the earth as all the nations come to Him (Ps. 72:11, Mal. 1:11, Phil. 2:10-11). This is only possible because of the godly Seed that was promised after the Fall (Gen. 3:15). So, in the midst of all the charges the Lord brings against His people through Malachi, there is in the center a reminder of what God is up to. He seeks godly offspring, a reminder of the promised Messiah who would come to set all things right.

Conclusion

God desires faithful marriages with faithful children worshipping Him according to Scripture. This is how He builds His kingdom. He hates the hypocrisy of adulterous hearts worshipping Him. He hates the putting away of your wife (and by implication, of your husband). But His desire for faithful marriages and faithful children itself reminds us of His grace. These things He desires point to Christ. And Christ came because we are not faithful in our marriages, because we are not faithful in our covenant with God.