

Marriage, Divorce, & “Putting Away” in Malachi 2

By Darren Smith - Originally Published: 11/11/2015 Last Updated: 6/8/2016

The following is an analysis of Malachi 2:13-17. This document has been produced because there are many mischaracterizations circulating today about our Lord's perspective on marriage and divorce; and many of these mischaracterizations of our Lord use a very small piece of this particular passage when advancing these incorrect doctrines. Unfortunately, many believers (well intentioned but unskilled in the handling of the Word), have been totally taken in by the online articles, publications, and conferences promoting such views. Others embrace these teachings simply because they say what “their itching ears want to hear.”

The individuals about which we speak use one of the phrases in Malachi 2 (specifically, verse 16) to proclaim that “God does NOT hate divorce!” One such individual actually sells a book promoting his doctrine of “God-sanctioned divorces,” even when the marriage relationships have not been scarred by adultery!

A believer with a New King James version Bible might initially react to such a statement by saying, “How can they get away with this? Malachi 2:16 clearly reads:

MALACHI 2

¹⁶For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce... (NKJV)

This argument, however, is not that easily won...

The author of this “God-is-completely-O.K.-with-divorces” book correctly points out the fact that the exact Hebrew text of Malachi 2:16 does not say “God...hates DIVORCE”, but that it really reads “God...hates PUTTING AWAY!” The original King James Version confirms this is correct, rendering Malachi 2:16 with the words “putting away.”

Once the author of this “divorce-is-O.K.-book” establishes his point about the original Hebrew words, he then explains that this particular passage is really about the fact that God just hates it when men separate from their wives in the “wrong manner.” The Israelites were “putting away their wives” instead of “appropriately” divorcing them – and this was the issue God was upset about! The author asserts that God would actually be *happy* if these Israelites had just *divorced* their wives and had not just “put them away.” He makes God's hatred in this verse a hatred of incorrect procedures rather than a hatred of the actual separation of two married individuals. After all, they proclaim, wouldn't God be happy if men were following a divorce rule that Moses himself had established? Such is the reasoning of this teaching that is sadly growing in popularity and acceptance...

Is God really O.K. with divorce? Is God only grieved if divorce is not done “properly?” Is God completely fine with divorce as long as we follow all the appropriate rules?

Below is the complete, pertinent section of Scripture which contains the verse in question. Like every other controversial verse a believer undertakes to study, a proper analysis of the entire passage will yield the accurate interpretation of the phrases within it – as well as the Lord's true perspective on the overall topic being discussed.

MALACHI 2

¹³And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand.

¹⁴Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. ¹⁵And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. ¹⁶For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

¹⁷Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied *him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where *is* the God of judgment?

The first thing to notice is that this passage which addresses the Lord's perspective on marriage and divorce starts with 2:13 and ends at 2:17. All five verses need to be taken into consideration. The Lord establishes, in 2:13, that the Israelites were weeping and crying at the altar of the Lord...and He is not hearing them. The rest of the passage, then, deals with WHY the Lord is not hearing the Israelites anymore.

How does the Lord explain the reason He has not been listening?

He starts with Israel's perspective: Israel is asking, "Wherefore?" (i.e., "Why is God doing this?") Then, at the end of this section of Scripture, the Lord returns Israel's perspective, again characterizing what Israel is thinking by using the phrase "Yet ye say..." (v. 17)

It is a short section of Scripture, a specific explanation of the issue presented in 2:13, neatly and succinctly packaged up in the following four verses. It starts with Israel's perspective and ends with Israel's perspective, a design which neatly addresses the issue and sets it apart from all the other complaints that the Lord is issuing against the nation of Israel through the prophet Malachi. All four of these verses of the explanation need to be examined closely to get an accurate picture of the Lord's perspective on marriage and divorce.

So let's review the entire section – all five verses - in greater detail. As stated above, verse 13 concisely and distinctly states what is happening:

MALACHI 2

¹³And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand.

The Israelites are calling out to the Lord, so much so that they are “covering the altar of the Lord with tears!” They are “weeping and crying!” And why is there the excessive “tears, weeping, and crying?” Because it has become evident that the Lord is not listening to them! In some way, over time, the Israelites have come to perceive the fact that God “regardeth not the offering anymore!” God is not “receiving it with good will” from their hands! He is ignoring them! This, then, is why there are excessive “tears, weeping, and crying.”

The Lord focuses first, NOT on the reason why He is ignoring them; He does not state that right away. Instead, He focuses first on Israel’s perspective, Israel’s attitude!

MALACHI 2

¹⁴Yet ye say, Wherefore?

Again, this is so critical! The Israelites HAVE NO IDEA WHY GOD IS IGNORING THEM! They say, “Why?” Think about this! They know God is not listening...so they bring more offerings and prayers to the altar. God is still not listening! Israel brings more gifts and prayers to the altar. Time goes by. They continue to perceive that God is not hearing them – that there is a SERIOUS problem between them and God. They continue to bring gifts and prayers to gain God’s favor, but nothing is working! God has made it clear – in some way – that He is hearing none of their prayers and is receiving none of their offerings!

The Israelites are finally brought to tears! They continue to come to the altar, to beseech the Lord with more tears and more crying! The longer the Lord ignores them, the more Israel weeps and cries, insomuch as the altar is said to be “covered” in tears!

And...they have absolutely...NO...idea...why...God is ignoring them...

So God sent them a prophet, Malachi, to tell them – among other things - why He was ignoring their cries and prayers. The prophet, here in Chapter 2, lays out very clearly what the particular issue is...and it is an issue the Israelites have not even perceived to be a problem:

MALACHI 2

¹⁴...[Why has God been ignoring you?] Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously...

This is as clear as can be. God has been ignoring the Israelites because of how they have been treating the wives “of their youth.” Israel has been dealing “treacherously” with the wives of their youth! THIS is why God is angry! THIS is why God has turned away His favor from them!

How has Israel dealt treacherously with the “wives of their youth?” By “putting them away!” We learn this from the end of verse 15 and the beginning of verse 16: The Lord warns that nobody should “deal treacherously with the wife of [their] youth” (v. 15b) for “the LORD, the God of Israel, hateth putting away...” (v. 16).

So, the point is established: The Israelites are beseeching the Lord and the Lord is not hearing! Why is He not listening? Why has he turned away His favor?

Because the Israelites are doing something that the Lord, the God of Israel, hates: They are dealing “treacherously” with the “wives of their youth”...and they are dealing “treacherously” with them by “putting them away.”

It is here, by using some of the phrases in this passage apart from their context, that false teachings are built.

Some belabor the point that God is only angry when men married at a young age treat their wives “treacherously,” because the passage specifically says God was angry with the Israelites for dealing treacherously with the wives “*of their youth*” Does this mean that God is not angry when men married later in life mistreat their wives (because those women are not the wives of their husband’s “youth”)? As we continue with the entire teaching and spirit of this passage, this concept will be exposed for the blatant error that it is.

Another phrase that is ripped out of it’s context and used to promote false teaching is the phrase “putting away.” Those who profit from making divorce an acceptable practice in God’s eyes are quick to point out that the text in Malachi 2:16 does NOT say “God hates divorce,” as some Bible translations render this statement. They belabor the fact that the Hebrew language literally says “God hates putting away” and they follow that initially correct assertion with statements like “God hates *putting away* does NOT mean God hates divorce!”

They build their teaching on the premise that the “putting away” of a wife in the Scripture is, in fact, a different practice than that of an Israelite writing that wife a “certificate of divorcement” as commanded in the law of Moses. The fact that these differences can be studied out in the Scriptures appears to add some validity to their argument. “Putting away” in the Scripture, a tradition expanded extensively by the leaders of Israel, *can be* shown to be different than writing your wife a “certificate of divorcement.”

However, these ill-informed teachers then take this concept and make an unwarranted leap with Malachi 2:16. They say, “God *only* hates putting away! That is all it says, right?” They will say, “The reason God hates ‘putting away’ is because it does not afford the ‘put away’ wife the ability to remarry because she doesn’t have a legitimate certificate of divorcement!”

Following their logic (instead of the passage itself), they essentially say, “God was mad at the Israelites in the book of Malachi because they had treated their wives treacherously. The way the Israelites had been treating their wives treacherously was by sending them away and NOT giving them a proper certificate of divorcement so they could remarry.” They conclude: “God, then, is O.K. with divorce! What He really hates is sending a wife away without divorcing her. Properly divorcing her would give her the freedom to remarry. That is what Malachi 2:16 is all about!”

Once again, however, you have a teaching that has it’s roots in lifting a single phrase (“putting away”) from it’s context. They take two conclusions they have established by their own designed sequence of logic (“God does not hate divorce” and “God would have approved of these men in Malachi they had completed the ‘certificate of divorcement’ process instead of performing the treacherous ‘putting away’ process”) and they read those conclusions back into the passage containing the original phrase...regardless of the fact that it ignores all the other words surrounding the original passage!

Once again, however, as we continue with the entire teaching and spirit of this passage, this concept will be exposed for the blatant error that it is.

We left off with verse 14:

MALACHI 2

14...[Why has God been ignoring you?] Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously...

Verse 13 said God is ignoring them. Why is God ignoring them?

Because they have dealt treacherously with the wives “of their youth.”

The next phrase is critical. This is GOD’s perspective:

MALACHI 2

14...yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Here is the question that will help us start to understand the *real* spirit of this passage: Why does it make God upset that the Israelites during that time period were treating, in this particular situation, the “wives of their youth” treacherously?

What does *the passage itself* say was God’s reasoning for being upset with the Israelites?

Nothing has to be read into the passage! The passage is clear! God is angry because those wives are the “companions” of their Israelite husbands! God is angry because those wives are the “wives” by virtue of the “covenant” made with them by their Israelite husbands!

How absurd is it then, for some to make a major teaching out of the fact that – in this particular situation – the Israelite husbands were dealing treacherously with the wives “of their youth” (as opposed to wives of husbands who are of an older age)? Would not a wife of someone’s *old* age still be that man’s “companion?” Would not a wife of someone’s *old* age still be a “wife of that man’s “covenant” with her? Of course!

So, if the reason the Lord gives for his anger here is the fact that the mistreated “wives of Israel’s youth” were “companions” of their husbands and were “wives” by virtue of “covenant” with their husbands, wouldn’t that apply to any and every marriage? Doesn’t the wife of a man become his “companion,” regardless of the age at which they are married? Doesn’t the woman become the wife of a man by virtue of the “covenant” made with that man, regardless of the age at which they are married? Of course!

But there is much more to show the real spirit of the Lord’s perspective in this passage. He leaves us no doubt whatsoever where His perspective lies. This is the most critical part of the passage, a section that is usually completely ignored by those who misinterpret the sense of this passage. The Lord continues explaining why He is angry with Israel by saying:

MALACHI 2

15 And did not he make one?

This emphatic, significant question hearkens back to creation – to when God first established marriage.

Why is God angry with Israel treating the wives of their youth “treacherously” by “putting them away?”

Because HE MADE THEM ONE!

At creation, God said:

GENESIS 2

²⁴Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

Israel, again – at the time of Malachi – was “putting away” the wives “of their youth.” To God, this was dealing “treacherously” with those wives. It brought His wrath, making Him turn away from Israel, despite the fact that they were crying out to Him with many, many tears! And why does the Lord say this “putting away” made Him turn from Israel?

Because God had made the two – the husband and the wife - ONE! THIS is why God was angry! This is why He had turned away! The Israelites were destroying the blessing that God had given to mankind – the wonderful blessing He showered on this unique relationship that depicted the “image of God” on earth! He – like only He could – created a “oneness” in this relationship!

In light of what we have covered so far, it begs the obvious question: if God was angry with the Israelites for “putting away” the wives of their youth and if God specifically said that He “hated putting away” because it destroyed the “oneness” that he had created – can we not easily conclude that God would hate the “certificate of divorcement” as well?

Does the process of “divorcement” retain the “oneness” that God created where “putting away” does not? No! Of course not! How can “divorce” retain God’s “oneness?”

Divorce, if anything, is a more permanent separation of the “oneness” that God has created than the process of “putting away!” Does not divorce sever the “oneness” completely – forever and ever? Of course it does!

Those who actually say that “God does not hate divorce” because God does not use the word “divorce” in this passage are not reading this passage! This passage clearly shows that God hates “putting away” – not because it is the improper procedure to use in a separation – but because of the simple, obvious fact that it is a separation! It destroys the oneness of the relationship that He has created with that “covenant!” Doesn’t a certificate of divorcement take that separation a step further, completely destroying the relationship that God has honored? Of course it does! Why, then, wouldn’t God hate the certificate of divorcement even more than “putting away?”

It is critical to see: This passage does **not** say God was angry with Israel because they “put away” their wives *without giving them a certificate of divorcement*! This passage does **not** say God was mad at Israel because they had not “followed the procedures properly” and granted the wife a certificate of divorcement! This passage is not about following some “approved separation

process” properly! It says nothing of the kind! There is nothing even remotely close to that concept in this passage!

This passage specifically says that God was angry with Israel for severing ties with their “companions.” This passage specifically says that God was angry with Israel for separating themselves from the wife with whom they had made a “covenant.” This passage specifically says that God was angry with Israel for destroying the “oneness” with which God Himself blessed them when they entered into their marriage covenant. THAT is why God was angry! And THAT is why God hateth “putting away!”

But there is much more in this passage to drive the point of “oneness” home – a “oneness” that gets destroyed with “putting away” or “divorce.” It is a “oneness” that leads us to our Lord’s ultimate purpose in marriage relationships. The Lord says:

MALACHI 2

¹⁵And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit.

God first asks the question which hearkens back to creation and the establishment of marriage:

Did I not make [the two] ONE? Yes!

He then asks what really should be punctuated as another question: He says, “And Yet” – meaning, “And still today” – “had God the residue of [that] spirit?” Or, “Today, does [not] God carry with Him the residue – the remains – of the original spirit He Himself exhibited at the moment He created that ‘oneness?’”

In other words, does He not still – in the same spirit – make the two one TODAY...just as He did back then? Does God not – yet – still - retain a remnant of the original spirit He exhibited when He made Adam and Eve one? Would He not still do that – in the same spirit – TODAY? Of course He would! He did not stop making husbands and wives ‘one’ after Adam and Eve! He is “yet” – He is still doing that today!

During the time period covered by the book of Malachi, when the young believers in Israel took wives for themselves, would not God make those couples ONE too? Of course He would! God would exhibit the same spirit today that He first exhibited in the Garden when He blessed Adam and Eve with their “oneness!”

God’s assertion is essentially, *“I am angry with you Israelites because you severed what I made one. And don’t think I only made Adam & Eve one. No! I retain in me the remains of that same spirit I had in the garden! I still make husband and wife ONE today!”*

But – now – we get to the purpose of this “oneness”...

MALACHI 2

¹⁵...And wherefore one?

Why did God make them one?

Why did He put such an emphasis, such a solemn sanctity on this union between a man and His wife? For what purpose would He make such a “big deal” of the marriage relationship? The answer is wonderfully, beautifully simple:

MALACHI 2

¹⁵...That he might seek a godly seed.

The “oneness” is for the children! God may have planted a literal “garden” in Eden as a symbol, but the “fruit” He was really after, the harvest He really wanted was a “godly seed!” A seed, not from the plants He put into the garden, but from the people He put in the garden! The “oneness,” then, is a critical component to Godly children – to His children! If you destroy the “oneness” of the marriage relationship, you are damaging the relationship God himself has put in place to cultivate and grow His most precious possession: the children! Is it any wonder, then, that the Scripture says He hates “putting away?” Based on these words, wouldn’t He hate anything that would destroy that “oneness?” Of course!

The Lord’s goal is “Godly offspring!” It is a sobering, awesome responsibility given to man. But it is one that – amazingly – we don’t often consider when contemplating our individual marriage relationships...and the freedom...or restrictions...that such a relationship entails.

And the perspective of the Lord described here in Malachi is consistent throughout the Scriptures!

When the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus in an attempt to justify the “putting away” of a wife for any cause (Matt. 19:3), did not the Lord take those Pharisees back to creation (Matt. 19:4-6)...just as the passage in Malachi 2 does?

MATTHEW 19

³The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? ⁴And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, ⁵And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? ⁶Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Having been rebuked by the Lord regarding their question about “putting away” their wives, the Pharisees then pressed the issue of divorce, using “the certificate of divorcement” in the law of Moses. They wanted the freedom to use the “certificate of divorcement” in any circumstance. Again, however, the Lord Jesus points to creation saying that “from the beginning it [this divorce or separation] was not so.” (Matt. 19:8-9).

MATTHEW 19

⁷They [The Pharisees] say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? ⁸He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

It is the creation account, then, that contains the origin, the model, and God's true design and meaning of marriage.

To put it another way, the Pharisees sought justification for their lax parameters about separating from one's wife, the same lax parameters that the Israelites apparently were living under during the time of Malachi. Not only does the Lord reject their request for greater freedom, He instead lays down an extremely strict standard that is so hardfast, so immovable, and so restrictive that even His own disciples respond by saying, "if the case of the man be so with his wife (i.e., if God's perspective of marriage is really this way), it is good not to marry!" (Matt. 19:10).

Does God mean to restrict us so harshly? Does not God concern Himself with how we may change over time? Does God not realize what many circumstances can arise in a marriage relationship over time? The Disciples – in light of the Lord's restrictions on their "marital freedom" – became suddenly hesitant about marriage altogether! They started to question the entire institution of marriage in front of the Lord Himself who had ordained it!

Amazingly (and significantly), in Matt. 19:11-12, the Lord Jesus responds to His disciples by sticking firmly to His strict prohibition of marital separation. Our Lord actually "doubles-down" on His restriction, affirming that He really does intend to be as strict as He initially sounded:

MATTHEW 19

¹¹But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. ¹²For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

The Lord essentially says, "*Those are the rules! They are tough, not everyone can accept them, but those are the rules about marriage! You could always become a eunuch, you know...*"

Is that hard-fast position the Lord has enunciated the end of the discussion? Is there nothing else the Lord would have us to learn about this subject...other than this hard, fast, seemingly unforgiving rule?

Here is what cannot be missed; this is what happens immediately after this conversation about divorce...

MATTHEW 19

¹³ Then were brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. ¹⁴ And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

Why is this story inserted here in Matthew 19? What does this interaction possibly have to do with the topic of divorce that has gone before it?

The topic that has gone before this passage is about the rights of the married man, is it not? The topic that has gone before this passage has been about what those married men are allowed to do

and what they aren't allowed to do in regard to their marriage relationship, is it not? The topic that has gone before this passage is about the married man's freedom, is it not?

And the discussion that has occurred before this passage about the children put such a restriction on married men that the disciples did not even think marriage was a worthwhile institution because of its harsh restrictions, did it not?

What significant component of the man's marriage relationship was not involved at all in that confrontational discussion with the Pharisees about a man's divorce rights? What significant component of the man's marriage relationship did not come up at all in the discussion about a man's freedom, the discussion about man's ability to move on to something else...before the little children tried to come to see the Lord Jesus?

What about the children in those marriage relationships?

The discussion was all about the rights and freedoms of the adults. Did anyone care about the children those "marital freedoms" might affect?

In the discussion about marital separation, the rights and freedoms of the adults were of grave concern. The restrictions on those adult rights and freedoms were of such consequence that even the disciples concluded that there was ***no tangible value*** to entering into an institution which so restricted the freedom of the adult.

And then the children show up.

Is that a coincidence?

Those same disciples, focusing on their own rights, their own freedoms, and what they put a priority on, rebuke those who are trying to bring their children to the Lord. The disciples have other "important" things that take priority over the children. The children, the disciples have obviously reasoned, cannot be allowed to interrupt the important business to which they, the adults, are attending...

Does the placement of this story about the children now start to make sense?

Those who brought the children only wanted the Lord Jesus to put His hands on them, to have the Lord bless them. But the disciples, the same disciples who see no tangible value in entering into a restrictive institution like marriage, would have none of these children interrupting the business at hand. They rebuke those with the children and try to send them away.

Aren't our discussions about our freedom to divorce the same way? Don't we get so involved with our important, "adult" business and all the work that entails that we feel we warrant our separation from "restrictive" marriages, so much so that we totally discount the importance of the children? Don't the disciples, after this conversation about divorce, exhibit the very same attitude of a typical adult contemplating a divorce? Often, when contemplating divorce solely for the means of "freedom," considerations regarding the children cannot be allowed to interrupt the more "weighty" issues at hand! And, here, right after the discussion about divorce, it is pictured for us beautifully!

The kids try to come to the Lord. The disciples do not have the time to consider them! The children cannot be allowed to interrupt the proceedings! The disciples try to keep them away!

The Lord Jesus essentially says, *“No. Let them come to me. THIS is what the Kingdom of heaven is all about! The kingdom of Heaven is about the children! Children are the very essence of the Kingdom!”*

Isn't this the same God who we have been reading about in Malachi? God, like Malachi says, is all about “Godly offspring.” God is about the children.

If, as Malachi 2 says, God creates the “oneness” of the marriage relationship to produce Godly offspring, if that is His “recipe” for Godly offspring, doesn't a separation of that “oneness” get in the way of the children becoming “Godly?” Doesn't that inhibit their access to God, to the truth He has woven into His creation? THIS is the sense, the spirit, of Malachi 2:15...

MALACHI 2

¹⁵...And wherefore one? [i.e. Why did God make the married man and woman one?]....That he might seek a godly seed.

It's the children! Godly offspring! That is the reason that God made the married couple “one.” This is the heart of the text in Malachi 2!

After stating the purpose for God making the man and wife one, the Lord puts forth another solemn warning:

MALACHI 2

¹⁵...Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

The Lord has shown, in the preceding verses of Malachi 2, that He still stays true to the original spirit He had in the garden of Eden when He made Adam and Eve one. Still, to this day, with a remnant of the same spirit, He continues to make married couples “one.” He continues to bless them as one with the goal to reap a harvest, the fruit of Godly offspring from them.

Now, here, in this warning, God tells Israel to take heed to their own spirit, their own attitude about the marriage relationship into which they have entered. He wants Israel to make sure that they, in their lives and attitudes, are honoring the relationship with which God has blessed them and bound them. God would have none deal treacherously against the wives of their youth, as they were constantly doing at that time.

It is then, in this context, that the following statement is made:

MALACHI 2

¹⁶For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

For those reading the entire context of this passage, the reasons for God's hatred of "putting away," this "treacherous" act, have already been established. The "oneness" God created is destroyed. The "companions" are separated. The "covenant" has been broken.

Here, in this verse, God characterizes this action further, describing it as "one covering violence with his garment." This is a very odd phrase at first glance. In Psalm 73:6, it speaks of those who wear "violence" like it is "a garment." In that passage, the violence being done by the individual is so blatant and so open, it seems like something the person actually wears – and something that they wear proudly!

In the Malachi passage above, it says a man "putting away" his wife is like one that covereth violence with his garment. In other words, this man is hiding the violence he is doing to his victim. No doubt, he, like the man in Psalms 73, is causing destruction. But, in contrast, what this man is doing is a violence that is hidden. By performing this Pharisee-sanctioned "putting away" of his wife, this man is *disguising* his violence. He is covering it up. He is doing something society has deemed respectable and he is hiding behind it! However – make no mistake – the Lord says the only thing that man is doing is hiding the very real violence he is committing and this violence he is committing is against his wife. It is a violence that does NOT escape the notice of the Lord!

How far is this from the teaching that says, "God is O.K. with divorce?" God calls the separation of the man and wife a violence that is being perpetrated; it is violence to one's own "companion," violence to the one with whom you have made a "covenant," violence to the one with whom the Lord has made you "one," and violence to the "Godly offspring" that the Lord intended to harvest by making the two "one." THAT is why the Lord hates "putting away!"

Once again, then, the Lord reiterates his warning to Israel:

MALACHI 2

¹⁶...therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

"THINK, Israel, about the spirit with which you are handling your relationship with your wife! Do NOT deal treacherously with her! To put her away is to do something I hate, something that is directly opposed to my purposes in making the two one!"

With this said, the Lord closes this short section about Israel's abhorrent behavior regarding marital separation with a damning condemnation. To do this, he goes back to Israel's wailing and crying on the altar that they have been continually doing. It is a wailing and abundance of tears the Lord has consistently ignored. The Lord says, in His conclusion of this particular topic:

MALACHI 2

¹⁷Ye have wearied the LORD with your words.

"Israel," God essentially says, "you have worn me out. It is absurd that you cry out to Me and ask Me to be favorable to you in the midst of your terrible behavior."

Remember, Israel had said, "Wherefore [do you ignore us, Lord?]." They did not have a CLUE why God was angry with them! They had become so numb to their own behavior that they did not have any idea that God's shunning of them might have something to do with what they

themselves were doing each day! That continual crying and wailing to the Lord betrayed their total and complete ignorance of the fact that their behavior was abhorrent to God!

Therefore, God says, “Ye have wearied the LORD with your words.” But – the Lord’s condemnation of their ignorance and haughtiness is not complete...

MALACHI 2

¹⁷...Yet ye [Israel] say[s], Wherein have we wearied *him*?

God’s answer to this question is profound in light of the subject matter that has gone before. The Lord tells Israel why they weary Him and why He justifiably ignores them:

MALACHI 2

¹⁷...When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where *is* the God of judgment?

This verse must be left in it’s context to grasp the gravity of this entire passage! In this context, Israel was flippantly “putting away” their wives, separating from their “companion,” breaking the “covenant” with their marriage partner, and destroying the “oneness” that God created between the husband and wife, a “oneness” that He has continued to bless mankind with since the original creation.

And Israel is doing it with the assertion that what they are doing is actually “good in the sight of the LORD!” They have taken their doctrine of “putting away” their wives and equated it with something that the LORD himself would delight in!

Isn’t that what these false teachers espousing God-sanctioned divorces are doing today?

But what does the Lord call that attitude, that perspective about marital separation in this passage?

He calls it “EVIL!”

“EVIL!”

Israel was saying “Everyone that doeth evil is GOOD in the sight of the Lord.”

What was Israel doing? What does this context say? Israel was putting away their wives! And God says they were doing evil!

Israel’s minds had become so warped by their own perspectives on marriage and marital separation that they had arrived at the point where they were not only saying that the Lord condones their “putting away” of their wives, but that those men were doing “GOOD” by putting away their wives! And they added to their audacity by saying things like “Where is the God of judgment?”

Or, in other words, “*God isn’t doing anything about the ‘putting away’ of our wives, so He must be totally O.K. with it!*”

Can anything be further from the truth? Can anything be more diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Lord set forth in this passage in regard to marriage? It is absurd! And that is why Israel's cries were wearying the Lord! That is why He ignored them despite their abundance of tears!

It is after this section of Malachi, in verse 1 of Chapter 3, that the Lord turns his focus from Israel's list of offenses to the coming judgment He is going to send. He makes reference to the messenger which is coming (Elijah/John the Baptist) who will prepare the way for the coming Lord. In verses 2 and 3, it talks of the Lord appearing like a refining fire, one who would purify the sons of Levi and take away the abhorrent behavior and attitudes he has been listing in the first two chapters of Malachi. He lists more judgments and more behavior in that chapter.

In the last Chapter of the book of Malachi, he talks about the coming day of the Lord (v. 1). In verse 5, the Lord once again reiterates His plan to send "Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord."

And – what is the focus there? What is the main thing the Lord has to fix in Israel?

Do they need their theological positions adjusted? Do they need to be better priests? Do they need to be better servants? Do they need to be kinder to each other? No.

Here is the final verse of the Old Testament:

MALACHI 4

'And he [Elijah the prophet] shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

What was God's concern? What was the burden of Malachi's entire treatise?

The children! The "godly offspring!"

God essentially said, *"You better get your mind off yourself and get it back on your children. If you don't, I will come and smite the earth with a curse."*

Children are, again – at the most basic level – the most fundamental building blocks of the "Kingdom of God." And God was not looking for just large numbers when He commanded us to be "fruitful and multiply." He is not just looking for "offspring." No, the Lord's desire is for "**Godly** offspring." And, in God's original design, "Godly offspring" are the result of the "oneness" that He Himself creates in the marriage relationship.

These "Godly offspring" are the children that were being ignored by Israel's selfish behavior and stubborn refusal to accept God's holy design and purpose of marriage.

Are we not doing the same today?

All over the internet, you can find false teachers who call "evil" good, who say that "divorce is O.K." in God's eyes. They take the most fundamental building blocks of God's creation and kingdom, the most cherished relationship blessing that the Lord bequeathed to mankind, and the very relationship that creates a tangible picture for us of the "image of God," and toss all that

aside in the name of human “freedom” and “pursuit of happiness.” They are, like the source of their ideas, a promise of pleasure that masks a very real death.

What, after all, could be better for anyone than to live to the fullest the plan for which God created us? Do we think there is anything better for us than God’s original design? Can we not recognize that any principle opposed to God’s design is the lie of Satan?

The church needs to get back to recognizing the true purpose of the marriage relationship. We need to understand that the “oneness” that God creates in our marriage relationships is the key to “Godly offspring.” We need the hearts of Fathers to return to their children.

In focusing on the blessing God has given us in our own children, maybe we will start to understand the wondrous love God Himself has for us – HIS children.

May we be so blessed to understand such a love.