

**Purposes for Marriage, Part 3—Malachi 2:13-16—7/27/2025**  
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Today I continue a marriage refresher series that's a break from our normal exposition as we recall the big picture on this vital area.

As I've said, whether you are married, want to be married, used to be married, or may never be married, this truth matters.

We live in a culture that attacks basic realities like male & female & must be ready to explain God's design for the fundamental family unit.

So we recalled from the beginning how God designed marriage for companionship & for completion or complementary roles.

Genesis 2 tells God's order of creating man as the leader & showing man's need for help & then creating woman from man as his helper.

But that partnership was not only for personal pleasure because Genesis 1 says God gave blessings & commands to both the man & the woman to reproduce & spread & rule creation.

So we noted how God designed marriage for co-laboring & children.

Those were four overall purposes for marriage—God designed it for companionship, completion, co-laboring & children.

Then 5<sup>th</sup>ly, we noted how God designed marriage for consecration, for being set apart to serve God together, to be holy to Him, to honor Him.

That's why God always prohibited religious intermarriage—meaning marriage between a believer & an unbeliever.

We read in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6:14-18 how it makes no sense for a believer to be joined with an unbeliever—& be unequally yoked.

God's followers were never to enter marriage with pagans.

Of course, there can be a level of consecration to God in marriage when 1 spouse becomes a believer as 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 clarifies.

But God's command for His people was always to enter marriage only with a fellow believer.

That consecration of marriage provides for & protects the passing on of truth & faith to children & the generations to come.

When we understand that companionship & complementary roles & co-laboring in marriage, it only makes sense for a believer to marry another believer to share that partnership.

Likemindedness in faith in Christ & Scripture is vital in every area.

So we saw how God through Malachi confronted Israel for breaking trust with God by marrying followers of false gods.

Malachi 2:10 introduced that basic problem as a lack of faithfulness, an absence of committed trustworthiness that could be counted on.

Malachi confronted a problem of breaking trust or breaking faith, of being dishonest & deceitful & covering it over.

It was generated by an individualistic drive for serving self with no care for whom it affects long term.

And the same problem drives the marital neglect & divorce & redefinitions & gender confusion of our decaying culture.

At the root is a selfish willingness to flee responsibility & destroy commitments & ruin relationships all for personal gain & pleasure.

When that self-absorption infects marriages, something vital is lost to souls & to families & to society at large.

But listen—that is not the end—& it is not a reason to lose all hope.

It is not a reason to write off those around us or hate those we consider adversaries in government & society.

If we grasp the power of the Gospel & the beauty of God's design, we can have anchored hope that God can make a difference through us.

We can have excitement to be a counter-cultural community in the church where we are bound by transcendent commitments.

We can see marriage as a solemn joy from God & a treasure for couples that becomes a tool for influencing generations.

That's our goal as we return to Malachi 2 to note a 6<sup>th</sup> purpose of God for marriage & then expand that purpose in 2 ways.

So we'll have one main point today in the series of God's purposes for marriage & we will outline & expand on that point in 2 ways.

That 6<sup>th</sup> purpose for marriage is **covenant commitment**—that God designed marriage for covenant commitment.

Turn to Malachi 2 & let's read Malachi 2:10-16. [READ]

As I said last week, verse 10 frames this about faithfulness.

And we studied how verses 11-12 described the sin of marrying the daughter of a foreign god in all its abominable, defiling treachery.

Since marriage is about God, believers must marry in the Lord.

Malachi clearly teaches that marriage is first & foremost about God.

God is present at the marriage ceremony & He is responding all the time to the way we conduct ourselves in marriage.

And that's why the 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 implications of marriage as a covenant commitment that we'll outline today is about marital vows.

Put it like this—**point #1**—covenant commitment defines our view of marital vows—of those “I do” promises in a wedding.

Because God designed marriage for covenant commitment—that's **overall point #6 in this series**—because of that overall point today, let's note **1<sup>st</sup> how that defines our view of vows**.

### **#1-Covenant commitment defines our view of marital vows.**

Read Malachi 2:13-14 again as we think about this. [READ]

Verse 14 connects divorce with God rejecting their worship.

Their divorces answer the question of why God was not responsive.

LORD/Yahweh is the covenant-making God who loved Israel & committed to her like the OT prophet Hosea married Gomer.

That's the God who was offended by these divorces, because He is a God of His Word—**He keeps His promises**.

Because God cares about loyalty & honesty & integrity, He cared greatly about the closest human commitment in marriage.

Malachi 2:14 calls that commitment a covenant, meaning it was a promise entered into with great seriousness.

That's like Proverbs 2:17 warning of one “*that leaves the companion of her youth & forgets the covenant of her God*.”

Malachi 2:14 describes God as a witness of that covenant between a husband & wife when they are joined together as 1 flesh in marriage.

From the time God led the first wedding in Genesis 2, marital **vows** have always been before God with **Him** as a **witness**.

That kind of witness is more than an observer—God affirms the ‘*I-do*’ vow commitments & He also holds the couple to their word.

But the Israelites had forgotten that seriousness when they pondered why God was not responding to their prayers.

They knew God was not receiving their worship because that theme in Malachi is repeated in verse 13 & they asked why again in verse 14.

They sensed their spiritual emptiness & distance from God & verse 13 describes weeping & groaning to get God to hear.

When they knew God was not responding, they tried emotion to see if that would move Him, even enough to cover God's altar with tears.

But it must have been like the tears of those with sorrow over sin's consequences who have no heart to turn from their sin.

Those are like the tears of Cain & Esau & Judas—worldly sorrow.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:8-11 describes the difference between that kind of worldly sorrow and true godly sorrow.

Godly sorrow evaluates and mourns based on how God views sin & then seeks to repent & faithfully follow God.

Worldly sorrow mourns over consequences & not having God's blessings, but worldly sorrow has no heart to change.

Israel wanted the blessings of God, but not the God of the blessings.

But by Malachi, God was letting them know that did not work.

That doesn't work because marriage & all of life are lived before God.

So marriage vows are 1<sup>st</sup> to God & then to each other as a covenant commitment both to God & to your spouse.

And those vows are witnessed by others who also hold us accountable.

Malachi's point was that their religious-sounding pleas with God amounted to nothing because they were ignoring their sin.

Their marital life had affected their life with God.

That's like the warning of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7 for husbands, isn't it?

Husbands: *"live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; & show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."*

In other words, it's true for NT believers too—your prayer life is affected by your marital covenant just as in Malachi's time.

Proverbs 5:18 says to rejoice with the wife of your youth & yet Malachi 2:14 says they abandoned the wife of their youth.

They had dealt treacherously with their wives despite God's design of companionship that is described in verse 14.

Marriage, like all relationships, is built on trust & they broke that.

Remember this word occurs 5 times in this section—to deal treacherously, to break trust or break faith, to act faithlessly.

They abandoned loyalty to God & to their wives, the two most important persons in existence for a husband.

They had forsaken their covenant vows, their promises to God.

And they were abandoning His design to train up believing children as we read next in verse 15 as part of the broken vow. [READ]

As we said last week, marriage has long-term & evangelistic purposes for reaching the lost in this generation & beyond.

Verse 15 mentions a seed of God, a godly offspring, referring to believing children, the goal of the next generation following God.

Divorce tragically displays to kids that your word did not hold weight, that faithfulness did not matter & that commitment was not important.

If these men had a remnant of the Spirit, a portion of God's truth at work in them, they would not commit such treachery.

They would not jeopardize & undermine the faith of their children.

So the final charge of verse 15 begins with a heart check—***watch yourself***—take heed, guard yourself in your spirit, your inner man, so that you don't do this treacherous wickedness.

We all must deal with thoughts & desires & burdens & issues inside.

We must kill the discontent or lust or weariness or anger or bitterness or pride or selfishness or withdrawal or plotting or planning or arguing or whatever sin may go on inside.

Marriage is to be protected, nurtured, kept, studied, strengthened, persevered, enjoyed, kept loyal & faithful & honest & trustworthy.

It is a covenant commitment with **vows** made before God.

And that same covenant commitment **also** defines our view of divorce.

So let's note that as a 2<sup>nd</sup> point today under that main point of God's design for marriage as a covenant commitment.

God's design of marriage as a covenant commitment, 1<sup>st</sup>, defines our view of vows; & now **2<sup>nd</sup>ly, defines our view of divorce**.

Point #2—Marriage as a covenant defines **our view of divorce**.

Marriage has been under attack for decades by the proliferation of unbiblical divorce in our country, even in the professing church.

People study Scripture to find loopholes & excuses for divorce.

Think: they study the Word of the God who keeps His Word—why?—to find ways not to keep their own words of commitment in marriage!

One book tells ladies they are like Abigail & husbands are fools like Nabal & thus offers a road map to unbiblical divorce.

It misses that Abigail never divorced Nabal & yet it's used by **so-called** Christian counselors to poison minds & wreck marriages.

So we need to remember & reassert & proclaim what we find very clearly stated in verse 16—God **hates** divorce.

That's the **first defining view** we must recognize & affirm that is consistent with God's 1<sup>st</sup> wedding pronouncement of 2 becoming 1.

As Jesus said in Matthew 19:6 & Mark 10:9 after quoting Genesis 2:24: "*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*."

Such truths give perspective on any breaking of the marital bond.

And the weighty spiritual imagery of marriage that depicts God's relationship with His people also gives perspective.

Just as God never planned to divorce those He chose to love & make His own, so He never designed marriage to end in divorce.

Return to Malachi 2:16 with me & let's read it again. [READ]

Here's how God feels about divorce—He hates it.

It's unfortunate that the ESV misses that fact by linking the hate with the person who divorces because that's not the sense.

Literally verse 16 says "*He hates divorce*" or "*hating divorcing*" with a continual sense of revulsion against divorce & the one who divorces.

And it attributes that as being said by the Lord God of Israel.

So most versions translate that indirect quote as a direct quote.

God has an intense rejection of divorce.

And for anyone who has walked through divorce personally or as a child or with others, God's feelings on this come as no surprise to you.

As much as the world may paint it is an easy escape, divorce is always painful and destructive to all involved.

People may suppress that & be blind to it, but it cannot be denied.

The majestic names of God make it clear who was speaking.

He is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping, faithfully relational God of Israel & Yahweh of hosts, the armies of heaven and earth.

The God who is husband to His people & sovereign over all is the God who says He hates divorce & its disturbing violence.

When these Israelite men walked away from their commitment to the wives of their youth, they polluted their own garment with violence.

The “*wrong*” of the NAS translation is the wrong of violence.

Divorce is emotionally & relationally violent in the feelings & trusts & friendships & homes that it cuts & shreds to pieces.

That's why we speak of emotional scars left on people's lives.

And those affected by divorce know the hurt of feeling like you are wearing the shame like the garment in verse 16.

The garment should've been a symbol of protective love like when Boaz covered Ruth to show his intent to marry her.

But divorce sadly does the opposite.

I wish we could stop there as if such a sad topic never met real life experience in this world, but we know that's not the case.

We know that divorce does happen even though it is not right.

So we need to know if there's anything else God said that offers some hope or direction for how to deal with divorce.

We can be thankful that God knew that life in a sinful world needs instruction for the messes that sin makes in the lives of people.

God knew that hardness of heart could lead to trouble & that unfaithfulness & immorality could happen.

So God gave laws to Israel to limit divorce & He gave other instructions to give direction for how to think & respond today.

Never does God honor divorce, but He does permit it in 2 narrowly defined, undesirable circumstances.

One of those is seen in Ezra 9-10 when Ezra was in Jerusalem earlier in the same century & faced the same problem Malachi addressed—the sin of marrying foreign women with their false gods.

Ezra's solution was to separate from those foreign women.

God said the Israelites had intermingled the holy seed, their offspring that was supposed to be set apart as God's special covenant people.

So children were being raised by unbelieving foreign women & that risked the faith being passed on to the next generation.

Ezra knew that had to end & that's why he approved putting away the foreign women & their children as the only solution.

That was an act of repentance to remain in & preserve the faith.

And when you think of it, it is similar to the divorce permitted by the Apostle Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:15 so let's turn there to see that.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:15 says that if a believer is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever leaves, let him leave.

And that's essentially what needed to happen in Ezra 10—the idol worship of the unbelieving women needed to leave.

If these Israelites were going to serve the God of Israel alone, their lives & homes needed to be free of all idol worship.

So unless a foreign woman was committed to leave false gods to serve Yahweh God like Ruth did, then she should leave the believing home.

This was Ezra's counsel for a man who decided he would not allow pagan religion for his household & children.

I'm not saying that's a solution for any situation today, but it shows marriage as a spiritual issue where children's future faith is at stake.

And it frames divorces in Ezra's time as unbelievers leaving believers, which is 1 of the biblical permissions for divorce.

Now let's read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:8-15 to see this in the NT. [READ]

The thrust of this section is to remain as you are.

Whether married, single, slave, free—whatever situation in life you are in when you become a believer—you can remain as you are.

The sanctifying influence of a believing spouse is a morally purifying influence on an unbeliever & children.

If an unbeliever agrees to live with that influence, then no reason exists to send away or divorce an unbelieving husband or wife.

But verse 15 concedes that sin may happen, that an unbeliever may reject the faith of a spouse who has come to follow Christ.

And if an unbelieving spouse does leave, a believer is to let him leave.

In that case, the believing brother or sister is no longer under bondage, meaning he or she is free even to remarry in the Lord.

As 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:39 says of one whose spouse has died, a believer is free to remarry, but only in the Lord, meaning only to another believer.

So this gives the 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 very limited permissions for divorce—divorce is permitted when an unbeliever leaves a believer.

One permission for divorce is when an unbeliever leaves a believer.

But sadly in the church today, the question comes up, “What if I thought my spouse was a believer, & he or she left anyway.”

And my reply is “**Where was the church when that happened?**”

The church is responsible to seek out and rescue a professing Christian who sins by departing from his or her spouse.

And if that professing Christian refuses to repent, Matthew 18:17 says to treat them as a tax-collector or Gentile, meaning as an unbeliever.

That person's life is proving that he or she is not a Christian.

So the question about a professing believer leaving another professing believer should be answered by the church.

The local church is responsible to declare an unrepentant person an unbeliever in agreeing with God's Word.

When a church declares that, the believer may view a departed spouse as an unbeliever leaving as in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:15.

And the failure of churches to practice such discipline has left many Christians confused over how to evaluate their lives.

So be sure you are committed & connected to a solid local church—it is a protection & help in more ways than you know.

Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> limited permission for divorce found in Scripture is with sexual immorality as in the exception Jesus gave in Matthew 5 & 19.

Turn to Matthew 5:31-32 where Jesus corrected errors & we'll see Him correct a wrong view of Deuteronomy 24.

Follow along as I read Matthew 5:31-32. [READ]

Here Jesus called it adultery to for a divorced person to marry again or for anyone to marry that divorced person.

The only exception is if the divorce is for unchastity or fornication, which is from the Greek word porneia for sexual immorality.

That is illicit sex, unlawful intercourse—physically breaking the *one-flesh union* by physical adultery or prostitution.

Contrary to a loophole some try to imagine, that does not include looking at a woman to lust after her—that's not a reason for divorce.

Of course, that IS evil & wrong—I'm not minimizing that—and that's why Jesus condemned it as adultery in the heart.

But just as He did not allow capital punishment for anger or speech that are like murder in the heart, so He did not permit divorce for lust.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> permission for divorce is limited to cases of actual, physical, sexual immorality.

And even that is not a command to get divorced if immorality occurs.

It merely allows it in a very limited exception.

That exception clause occurs twice in Matthew, but some claim it is only talking about the engagement period.

So turn to Matthew 19, which clearly talks about being married because the disciples question if it is better not to marry at all.

And Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24, which is clearly about marriage because Adam & Eve did not have an engagement or betrothal period.

Read this context on marriage in Matthew 19:3-9. [READ]

Verse 9 restates the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and here it's in the context of marriage related to Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 24.

Jesus corrected them by clarifying that Moses permitted divorce only because of the hardness of human hearts.

Divorce was only a recognition of the wickedness of the human heart that moved God to regulate it, not condone it.

The point of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that was missed by this wrong question is that God regulated divorce to stop it.

The goal was to stop men from marrying & divorcing & then marrying again & then at some future point marrying that first wife again.

Deuteronomy 24 sought to guard against marriage & divorce being treated as temporary to try & then move on & try again.

Marriage is a sacred covenant commitment not to be treated lightly.

That marital covenant defines our view of vows & of divorce.

And even if immorality did occur, remaining married is still an option.

If a Christian is immoral & repents, a believing spouse's goal is to forgive & seek to restore the marriage.

As Jesus taught in Matthew 18 & Paul in Ephesians 4:32, we're to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us & we've been forgiven much.

Of course, that is not easy & we dare not minimize the betrayal that requires trust to be rebuilt & that can take time.

That is certainly difficult & we must not be insensitive to that.

But forgiveness & restoration can happen by God's grace in two Christians who humbly want to honor Christ.

The church may need to counsel & help, but God proves it's worth it.

Of course, I also don't mean a believer must stay married to a spouse who claims to be a Christian & proves otherwise.

The church should act in such cases as well to clarify the issue.

And be clear that the church & the police are both legitimate authorities to appeal to if there is physical abuse or real danger.

Physical abuse or real danger or violent crimes raise another category of problem that may involve legal protection & punishment.

Such criminal behavior has consequences separate from the consideration of biblical parameters of permissible divorce.

So to come back to that point—**Scripture gives 2 limited permissions** for divorce—an unbeliever leaving & a case of unrepentant sexual sin.

God's view of marriage as a covenant only allows those cases.

And that brings us back to the final exhortation in Malachi 2:15 that was repeated in Malachi 2:16 to close that section as the emphasis.

The emphasis was not to break trust, break faith, or be faithless toward God and unfaithful toward your wife or husband.

Never give up on your word nor quit your commitment & don't deceitfully try to cover it up or rationalize it away.

As Malachi 2:15 & 16 said, take heed in your spirit.

Guard yourself & deal with the thoughts & desires & issues inside.

That's something we all can do whether single or married.

Kill the discontent or lust or weariness or anger or bitterness.

Put to death the pride or selfishness or withdrawal or plotting or planning or whatever sin may go on inside.

Marriage is to be guarded, developed & delighted in with faithfulness.

So if you are a Christian—don't break faith with God & others.

As I tell all couples in premarital counseling, when 2 Christians marry, you commit that divorce never needs to be an option for you.

You tell the Lord & one another that divorce should never be pondered or discussed & never threatened or even joked about.

If you must face divorce, God will make it clear through His Word, His church, & the circumstances that clearly call you to freedom.

That's true whether it's a sexually immoral unbeliever or an unbeliever who abandons you.

Otherwise, don't dream about it or assume it would be better.

And if you hear this & think of how your past condemns you, realize that Christ can wash your past away & make you new.

God's love is shown by Jesus leaving heaven to come get a people who will trust Him to be gathered as His bride to be loved forever.



Jesus lived perfectly to give His garment of righteousness & He died sacrificially to wash away all our guilt & shame.

He rose again victoriously to prove His promises are good when He says He makes us completely new by His Spirit.

So as you apply the truths we've studied today, first apply the Gospel & feel the rest of being free & forgiven in Christ.

And if you wonder how to make sense of your marital troubles before you came to Christ, then let being new in Christ set you free to approach life with a new start.

Listen to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:27-28 from that chapter where his main thrust is to remain as you are when you came to Christ.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:27-28 says, "*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released [which means divorced]. Are you released [or divorced] from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*"<sup>28</sup> *But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.*"

Notice there that Paul was speaking to some people who came to Christ already divorced, released from a previous marriage, and he told them not to seek a wife, not to seek to be married.

But in verse 28 he immediately added that if you do marry, you have not sinned & then went on to say the same about a virgin who marries.

So when you come to Christ, you gain a fresh relational start.

As 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11 says, "*do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you*

*were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*"

You may have been many things as a non-Christian, but in Christian you are washed & set apart newly to Christ.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17 says, "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*"

So your past before Christ may label you many things, but in Christ you are labeled as a righteous child of God with the power to live with a fresh start.

I pray you know that joyful newness in Jesus Christ.

If you don't, we'd love to talk with you after the service.

And if we can counsel or care for you in any way, let us know.

I know I covered a lot today & I pray God will use it for good.

Now pray with me as we close.