

## “Divorce and Apostasy”

May 6, 2007

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Scriptural Foundation: Malachi 2:10-16, NIV

### Judah Unfaithful

<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

<sup>11</sup> Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

<sup>13</sup> Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

<sup>15</sup> Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

<sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

God's shepherds do not have the authority to decide which topics to preach about and which topics to avoid. As a pastor of Jesus' church, it would be a sin for me to refuse to teach on certain issues because they are too "theological" or because they are too "sensitive" or because they are too "controversial" or because they are too "offensive". A pastor is called to be God's herald; that is to say, God's messenger or God's ambassador, a herald of the Lord's Message and not of his own. The content of our message is predetermined for us, as God calls His ministers to proclaim His Word in fullness and in clarity. In fact, pastors offend God when we skip over certain parts out of cowardice or out of a lack of conviction, and yet, it is the temptation of every generation to waiver on this vital principle.

Certainly this is true of spiritual leaders of Malachi's day. In Malachi 2:9, a verse we studied briefly in a previous study, Malachi is speaking from God to the priests of his day and the Lord Almighty, through Malachi says,

<sup>9</sup> "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."

The priests were showing partiality in regards to the Law: that is to say, they were avoiding confronting the people in reference to certain aspects of the Law that dealt with certain sins that the Law revealed. Whenever God's messengers show partiality to the Law, they let the world and the world's philosophy take the lead in thinking in regards to sins among God's people, and let with no voice to check those sins, God's people rushed forward like runaway trains leaving a trail of devastation and death in their wake towards those very sins.

God's Word is an instrument of grace, grace that restrains evil and its painful consequences in our lives. But, what happens when God's messengers refuse to deliver the gracious Word that God gives them to deliver? The consequences multiply unabated, leaving a broken world in its brokenness with no hope of healing, and indeed, leaving God's own people in the brokenness of the world that Jesus Christ came to redeem them from.

One of the sins that the priests of Malachi's day decided not to talk about were sins against God's design in marriage. They decided that these things were of such a sensitive nature and of such an offensive nature to the people that they

simply would not deal with them. And, marriages among God's people in Malachi's day were in an awful state as a result. The priests were too afraid to say anything about it, and in fact, they were participating in those very same sins.

I can understand the priest's fear, for this morning God calls me to preach on a subject that the priests in Malachi's day were very reluctant to handle, and I do so with much prayer. I know that the subject of divorce is a very sensitive one and I pray that I would speak with clarity so as not to be misunderstood, with humility so as not to be self-righteous, and with boldness so as not to be cowardly. I speak on the subject for one reason: because God speaks about it. Because we are studying through the Book of Malachi, and we left off in the previous study at Malachi 2:9, it would be unfaithful for me to begin this study by saying, "Turn your Bibles to Malachi 2:17." You would say, "Pastor, what happened to Malachi 2:10-16?" I would say, "I decided to skip that section, because it might offend." I tell you, I would not be loving God if I did that, and furthermore, I tell you, I would not be loving you if I did that, for God's Word is always true and it always will bring blessing to those who hear it and receive it and obey it.

In Malachi 2:10-16, we discover Malachi giving a message, not only to the priests, but to all of God's people, and that message is this: glorify God by being faithful to your marriage covenant. We are, first going to discover, two sins grave sins against God's design for marriage and then we are going to discover five reasons to be faithful to your marriage vows.

First, we will look at two grave sins against God's design for marriage. These are not the only grave sins against God's design for marriage, but they are two that Malachi specifically deals with: the sin of mixed marriages and the sin of divorce. Another sin that we could include in that list would be the sin of sexual immorality.

The first sin that Malachi deals with is the sin of mixed marriages, as we see in Verses 11 and 12,

<sup>11</sup> Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

When we speak of mixed marriages, it is important to note that we are NOT referring to cross-cultural unions, or marriages of different races. The Bible does not condemn such unions, and in the case of Ruth, for instance, holds up one such a marriage between two races as "beautiful" and as "lovely", but the Bible is very clear that a believer is not to marry an unbeliever. Here he speaks of the marriage of a person of the covenant Nation of Israel marrying "the daughter of a foreign god", and the emphasis is not upon her race, but upon her religion and her faith; she is the daughter of a foreign god. It was spiritual mixing that God is deeply concerned about.

Jewish men, in Malachi's day, had returned from captivity to the land. The young men, as they arrived into this new land, looked around them and saw these lovely, young, single women all around them, from foreign lands. They began, as a result of their emotions and as a result of their physical desires to marry these foreign, young girls. In fact, it wasn't just the young men, but it was some of the old men, in leaving the land of captivity and starting a new chapter in life, they return to the land of their forefathers in the area of Jerusalem and Israel and they believe that it is time to start a whole chapter. They think, "The wives of our youth are getting older and look at all of these lovely, young women around us who are willing to marry us," and they were divorcing their wives and marrying these young ladies who worshipped other gods.

This problem of spiritually mixed marriages can be traced all through the Bible, and such marriages are, most clearly from the beginning of the Covenant God made with Israel, forbidden by God. In Deuteronomy 7, God says, speaking of these nations that worshipped other gods,

<sup>3</sup> Do not intermarry with them.

In the New Testament, Paul re-emphasizes this very principle as the New Testament church followed the Old Testament people of God and were guilty, also, of this sin, as we see in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-6. In 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul is speaking in reference to marriage and to some of the circumstances of an unbeliever being married to a believer, of the believer having the unbelieving spouse leave them, of a person whose spouse dies, and of a single person anticipating marriage. In Verse 39, he says,

<sup>39</sup>A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 6, the Apostle Paul is going to expand upon this principle, when he says,

<sup>14</sup> Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Paul is saying that if they marry someone who is the daughter or the son of a foreign god, then they are messing up the holiness that God intends for His people to be set apart for Himself and to produce generations of those who would worship Him.

Why is such marriage wrong? It is wrong because spiritually-mixed marriages disrupt God's plan for Christian families to be centers of worship unto God, centers of discipleship in leading others to faith, and for the glory of God and of His Son Jesus. They often, also, not only limit the opportunity to continue to produce generations of worshippers unto God, but they also put in front of the believing member the temptation to enter into idolatry itself and begin to turn away from the Living God.

Ezra, as you may recall, is a contemporary of Malachi. In Ezra 9, he speaks as well of this deep problem of the people of Malachi's day,

<sup>1</sup> After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. <sup>2</sup> They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."

The priests were involved in this, but look at righteous, godly, Ezra's response. Did he say, "Oh, that is too bad," no, he said,

<sup>3</sup> When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.

Do you think that this is a very significant sin of God's people when they practice it? Ezra certainly thought so. Nehemiah was also a contemporary of Malachi, and in Nehemiah 13 we read,

<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. <sup>24</sup> Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. <sup>25</sup> I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair... <sup>27</sup> Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"

This issue of spiritually-mixed marriages has to do with faithfulness to God. It has to do with apostasy. The bottom line here is, Christian, if you marry an unbeliever you are acting unfaithfully to God. Someone may ask the question, "What about dating an unbeliever?" Let me say, to date an unbeliever is to invite powerful temptation to sin and to idolatry itself into your life. It is impossible for you to pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray while dating an unbeliever. Why is that? It is because, in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, we say, "Father, who art in Heaven, lead us not into temptation," and we cannot pray that prayer, all-the-while saying, "Lord, lead me not into temptation, but in reality I am going to direct myself and walk myself right into the path of temptation that I know is going to be there for me." I encourage you to be wise, Christians, so that God might bless you fully.

Someone may ask the question, "What if I am presently married to an unbeliever?" There is a great word of hope. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, speaks to that great word of hope, when he says,

<sup>12</sup>To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. <sup>14</sup>For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

In other words, Paul is saying that God has placed the believer as a sanctifying element, but please understand, do not presume upon God's grace ahead of time and do not say, "I am going to get married in the hopes that this person will become a believer and in the hopes that I will be a sanctifying influence in their life."

God is gracious and we have to acknowledge that sometimes, when a Christian marries one who is not a Christian, God does graciously draw that non-believer into His family. We praise God when that happens and we rejoice over that, but, friends, please understand the teaching of God's Word: this is not the usual outcome. More often, the mixed marriage brings great sorrow and pain to the believer.

The second grave sin against God's design for marriage is the sin of divorce, as we see in Verse 14,

<sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

It is vital to know, and this is very important at the outset of this message so as not to be misunderstood, not everyone who is divorced is guilty of the sin of divorce. Whenever divorce occurs the sin of divorce occurs, but not everyone who is divorced is guilty of the sin of divorce.

In the Scriptures there are two exceptions to divorce being a sin for a particular individual. Those exceptions would be, first, if your spouse, your husband or your wife, is committed to a life of sexual immorality. The second is if your husband or your wife chooses to abandon you and divorce occurs as a result of their initiative and of their aggressive pursuit. In such a case, the one who is divorced is not guilty of sin. For this reason it is very important in the church that we would be very careful not to judge the sin of another quickly, and it is very important to keep that in mind all through my discussion of divorce in order to avoid misunderstanding. However, with that said, God does not recognize "no-fault" divorce. There is no such thing as "no-fault" divorce.

When a divorce occurs one of the parties is always guilty of sin against God in the act of divorce itself, and many times both parties are guilty of the sin of divorce, for the act of divorce is always an act of sin by at least one.

How strongly does God consider divorce to be a sin? In Verse 16 we read,

<sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel...

It could not be stated more strongly. God abhors the sin of divorce, and we have to ask the question, "Why?" I want to state that in a positive way and I am going to present five reasons why God loves faithfulness to the marriage covenant.

Reason Number One: The covenant of faithfulness glorifies God's name, as we read in Verses 10 and 11,

<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? <sup>11</sup> Judah has broken faith.

Malachi is speaking back to the time of Creation in thinking of Adam and Eve and what God created in the Garden: two becoming one flesh. Again, he is linking the sin of divorce to apostasy; to breaking faith not only with that partner but with God Himself.

God is deeply concerned for the glory of His own name. The very purpose of our existence is connected to glorifying God and in enjoying Him in His excellence and in His wonder. God says in Isaiah 43,

<sup>7</sup> ...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory...

God creates us for the very expressed purpose of bringing glory to His name. Isaiah 43 continues,

<sup>21</sup> ...the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise...

When Satan designs upon His people to tempt us, his design is not so much that he would get us to sin because he loves sin that much. He loves sin, but he loves sin for a purpose. He loves sin because of what sin does against God's glory. That is why Satan loves sin. His design in us is not so much to get us involved in every kind of sin, so much as it is to remove us from being a people who bring glory to God, and if he can get us to sin that is exactly his design so that he can remove us from being a people who can enjoy God and glorify God and bring praise to God's name.

The primary reason that sin is so very ugly and horrifying is that it robs God of the glory of which He is worthy, so this bringing glory to God is the great concern of every born-again Christian. We who have been redeemed by God and who have been given life in God's name, we now have this internal life that says, "I am created to bring glory to God. That is the very purpose and the very meaning of my life."

How does this sin of divorce rob God of His glory? This past week I was looking through the Internet, which is somewhat dangerous to do as there are all kinds of crazy ideas out there, and I came across a website that proclaimed, "God is imaginary". It had fifty proofs to show that God is imaginary. Proof number thirty-eight said, "If you have ever been to a Christian wedding you know that marriage is a big deal. You have the priest or minister standing with the couple, reading from the Bible, and praying. The ceremony takes place in the church which is the House of God. Dozens or hundreds of witnesses are on hand in front of God and the representative of God. A couple declares that they will wed 'until death do us part'. The Christian faith also puts a very large stigma on divorce. For example, Jesus says, 'I tell you, anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'<sup>1</sup> And, Jesus repeats that sentiment in Matthew 19, 'I tell you anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.'<sup>2</sup> So, let us review, when a Christian couple gets married we have all of these forces that should be working to keep them married. The marriage is performed in God's presence, in God's house, in front of God's representatives, and in front of many Christian witnesses. A couple presumably prays before and after the wedding for a good marriage, as do all of the witnesses, the priests and the minister. The couple knows that if they divorce and re-marry it is an act of adultery which God has forbidden. And do not forget this important line from the ceremony, 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder'.<sup>3</sup> Think about this, God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe. If God puts something together should it not be impossible to break it? Given all of this, and given the fact that an all-powerful-prayer-answering God is supposedly looking over the shoulder of the lives of the Christian couple, guiding them in spirit, and so on, what would you expect the divorce rate for the Christian to be? Clearly, the Christian divorce rate should be zero, but when we look at the divorce statistics of American couples and compare Christians verses non-Christians divorce rates we find this strange statistic – divorce rates among Christians match those among the rest of the population. It does not matter whether the couple is Christian or not. The reason for the high divorce rate among Christians is easy to see: God is imaginary."

Let me ask you, as you listen to this, does this make you angry? If so, who are we angry with? We should not be angry with this guy who is an atheist. His mind is darkened; he doesn't know God. He is speaking out of the darkness in which he lives. We need to be angry at sin, because sin is causing our God's name to be mocked among those who are heathen and unbelievers.

There is an easy way to solve that isn't there? Christians, be faithful to your marriage covenant. I tell you, if the church of Jesus Christ did that, the world could not keep it from a focus point of "20/20" or "60 Minutes". It would be

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:32

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:6b

blasted all over the place, “What is happening here,” but when it is not there is a collective shrug of the shoulders and they say, “There is nothing really there.”

The Second Reason: covenant faithfulness brings covenant blessings. We lose God’s eternal blessings when we disobey Him, as we see in Verse 12,

<sup>12</sup> As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

The idea here goes back to the covenant that God made with the people during Moses’ day. It was conditional. He said, “If you obey me I am going to bless you and if you disobey me I am going to curse you. This is the way I act and this is the Law of Life that I am placing before you.”

The Apostle Paul reiterates this in Galatians 6, when he says,

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

I tell you, and this is applicable to covenant faithfulness, do not give up. Today, God’s people have lost sight of the commitments God takes upon Himself in His covenant with us as we follow Him. We become afraid that if we obey God we will end up with lives of unhappiness, misery, and joylessness, but the fact of the matter is that God’s promise attaches itself to blessings to our obedience.

I was reading another news article about an advertisement that is on a billboard in the Gold Coast section of Chicago. It is an ad placed there by Fetman, Garland, and Associates, a law firm specializing in divorce. It has two scantily clad people on it, a man and a woman, and in big, bold letters on this billboard it says, “Life is short! Get a divorce!” The law firm says that they consider this ad “cutting-edge” and they will not make apologies for it. The lawyer says that this ad is not for everyone, but they are targeting couples looking for a way out of a bad marital situation, in other words: if you are tired of the person you are with. “If you are unhappy,” says Fetman, “that life is too short to continue in an unhappy marriage, those images provide hope.” This is the mindset of the world, but it is not the mindset of God’s people. We believe that life is short, “Obey God!” That is our billboard. Since our life is so short and eternity is so terribly long let us obey God because it is in obedience that blessings come.

Brothers and sisters, we are not orphans. God does not abandon us and if we follow Him He will fulfill His promise.

The Third Reason: covenant faithfulness enables us to worship God without hypocrisy, as we see in Verse 13,

<sup>13</sup> Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears.

There are a number of ways to translate this verse and this is what I believe this verse is teaching: it is describing these women who have been divorced by these men who said, “You are not as attractive and not as lovely, and now I can pick up this young, new bride. I am divorcing you and I am marrying this other girl.” These faithful Jewish women come to worship on the Sabbath and their hearts are broken and their lives are torn apart and they are crying before God. Their tears fall upon the altar and they are flooding the altar. God is a God who remembers those who are oppressed and He says, “After these women flood my altar with tears, you come up, the one who created this oppression, and you lay your sacrifice upon the same altar that is now covered with the tears of your wives whom you have divorced, and you think that I am going to accept that worship? Such worship is unacceptable to me. I remember the oppressed, not the oppressor.”

Our personal lives affect our ability to worship without hypocrisy and this is one huge area that Malachi leads us to. Worship is only accepted by God when we come with a heart-attitude of repentance from sin and not continuing in sin.

The great news is that God accepts sinners through Jesus, when we come in faith and we come before Him seeking such forgiveness and seeking to live, from that point on in holiness and godliness and seeking out restoration in those former relationships.

In the New Testament, Peter speaks of this same connection between covenant faithfulness and worship when he speaks to husbands in 1 Peter 3, ESV,

<sup>7</sup> Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

If we are not faithful in our covenant with our wives they our prayers will be hindered and our worship will be cut off.

Reason Number Four: covenant faithfulness keeps us from breaking our promises, as we see in Verse 14,

<sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why (do you not take pleasure in our sacrifices and why are you not going to accept our worship)?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Marriage is, first and foremost, a covenant being made not just between a man and a woman, but between a man and a woman and God. There are three parties to this covenant. When I marry, or officiate at a wedding, I begin by saying, "Dear friends, we are gathered here together in the sight of God to establish a holy covenant. What you are about to witness is a testimony of God's grace and goodness in the lives of this man and this woman, but this is also a Holy Covenant that is being made with God Himself. This is first and foremost a commitment to Him that what is now bound forever in Heaven will be bound on earth as long as these two shall live. Therefore, in the midst of our joy, we stand here also reverently and soberly and we also stand here in the fear of God." I go on to ask the couple several questions. I ask, "Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife and do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses that you will love, honor, and cherish her, and forsaking all others for her alone, you will live with her according to the ordinance of God in the holy bond of marriage so long as you both shall live." The person says, "I do," and if you are married you have said something to that same effect. You said, "I do." Then I say, "Repeat after me, 'I, John, take you, Susie, to be my wedded wife; to have and to hold; to love and to cherish from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.'" Then I add these words, "To this I pledge you my good faith and my honor." That is to say, "If I break this, it is my good faith and my honor that I am throwing away."

That is the point of Malachi when he says, "If you break faithfulness with the wife whom you covenanted with, you are a promise breaker. You are throwing away you honor. You are throwing away your faith itself."

The last reason: this covenant faithfulness promotes a godly offspring, as we see in Verse 15,

<sup>15</sup> Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one?

In God's design to bring two people into this oneness, why does He do that? Notice Malachi's answer,

Because he was seeking godly offspring.

God design of marriage has produced generation after generation after generation of those who would love Him and those who would worship Him. Covenant unfaithfulness seriously damages the influence parents have upon their children to choose God.

Do not misunderstand, I recognize that covenant faithfulness itself is not a guarantee of a godly offspring. I also rejoice that many within broken homes choose to follow God, but the biblical fact is this, covenant unfaithfulness presents temptations to children to disbelieve the promise of God, to question His faithfulness, and to turn away from a parents' counsel. Consider what parents verbally teach when we teach our kids the Gospel. We say that God is faithful and He will never leave you and He will never forsake you. We say that God changes us so that we can overcome sin. We say that God forgives us everything and calls us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. We say that God enables us to endure hardship and to count it all joy when we encounter various trials and we look for the

greater reward; we know that our reward is not only in this life, but our reward is in an eternity to come. We say that He enables us and empowers us to overcome temptation. We say that He calls us to live our lives with eternity in view. Jesus is our sufficient Savior and He is able to save us not only from the path of our sin, but from the present power of our sin, and one day we will live without sin. We say that Jesus is our Lord and Sovereign, the One whom we bow down to and follow.

Then we go in to tell our children, "I am going to divorce your mom," or "I am going to divorce your dad." Friends, that statement denies everything that the Gospel affirms. Then the child scratches his head and says, "Now, why should I believe you about what you said about God?"

A covenant faithfulness promotes a godly offspring.

In conclusion,

<sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.

And here is the application,

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

Friends, may each one of us who are married, first may we guard our heart and may we guard our soul so that we would rejoice in the wife of our youth and so that we would rejoice in the husband of our youth and we begin to build a life together and say that we will commit ourselves afresh and new everyday for this. Some of you are in hard circumstances, and I know that, but I would encourage you to trust yourself to God and allow Him to give blessing even in the midst of emotional turmoil and great difficulty, for God is faithful and He will not leave you. I urge you to seek godly counsel. There is a lot of ungodly counsel around, but seek after godly counsel for God designs for you and me to become more holy as a result of our marriage union. In difficult places God still has designs for the present and the future of our lives so that we might become more like Jesus, and when we see Jesus Christ one day, for all the pain that we may experience in this life, understand that we will rejoice that God used those trials for the greater good of allowing us to be formed and fashioned as worshippers unto God.

For those of you who are not yet married, I urge you to enter marriage with prayerful caution. Seek out godly wisdom from people you trust, and if all of the godly people around you say, "Don't marry this person," you need to have a check in your spirit and say, "I need to listen to some of these folks."

If you have an unbelieving spouse, know that God has hope for you and He has a hope for you to have a ministry to your children and to your husband or wife in that circumstance.

If you have been divorced, know that God's church is not a place in which there are first- and second-class citizens, but know that God calls all of us to be humble and repentant.

And, if you are a child who is hurting from divorce in your parents, I urge you to place your eyes upon Him who is your Deliverer and your Healer, for He is faithful.

May God encourage us to guard ourselves and our spirit and not to break faith.