# If You Love Me, Keep My Covenant

Malachi 2:10-16

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*Return to God’s Love (Malachi)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Malachi 1. We are continuing in a series in Malachi called “Returning to God’s Love.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “If You Love Me, Keep My Covenant.”

Consider the words of Sinclair Ferguson as he speaks to God’s eternal covenant and plan of redemption:

“Before all time; prior to all worlds; when there was nothing ‘outside of’ God Himself; when the Father, Son and Spirit found eternal, absolute and unimaginable blessing, pleasure and joy in their Holy Trinity – it was their agreed purpose to create a world which would fall, and in unison – but at infinitely great cost – to bring some to grace and salvation.” **~ Sinclair Ferguson**

That’s really what this message is all about. We as the Body of Christ on this earth are to extend the love of God to all. We are to reflect God’s covenant of redemption in all our covenants on earth.

Three covenants are mentioned in our text: God’s covenant to Abraham in Genesis 12 & 15, His covenant with Moses in Exodus 20, and His covenant he gives to husband and wife in marriage.

If we are truly faithful and genuine Christians, God will give us the grace to be faithful to these covenants. The priests of Malachi’s day were not being faithful to these covenants. Let’s read about it in Malachi 2:10-16.

**Malachi 2:10-16**, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!

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

16 (ESV) “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

Vs. 16 (NLT), “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”

Once a person breaks his commitment to God, his relationship with human beings also suffers. God's commandments constitute the only sufficient basis for a meaningful and authoritative system of ethics, and in turn, one's obedience to these commandments is the only proper basis for being faithful and ethical in his personal relationships. One who is not faithful to God may still appear to be faithful to his wife or his friends, but without faithfulness to God as the context and background, all his apparently faithful actions are superficial, and ultimately sinful.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Don’t break my covenant with **Abraham** (Mal 2:10).

**Malachi 2:10**, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”

The first question concerns a common family “Have we not all one Father?” Aren’t we people of faith? Do we not believe in the “one God” who created us? Are we not distinct from the nations who worship many gods?

Why don’t we stay strong in the faith of Abraham? Why are we profaning the covenant of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Here is a reference to the covenant God made with Abraham, the father of the Israelite people (Isa. 51:2; cf. Matt. 3:9).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Why are you “faithless” “profaning the covenant of our fathers?”

**A Covenant of Grace**

Genesis 15:1-6 (cf. Gen 12, 17), “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” 2 But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” 4 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” 5 And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

**Grace, a Theme of the OT**

This theme is repeated throughout the Bible, most notably in Habakkuk, and it is quoted again in **Romans 1:16-17**, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

**Rom 3:21-26**, “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

**Martin Luther and the Righteousness of God**

We need God’s grace through faith because we have no righteousness apart from God. The phrase “a righteousness from God” was the phrase that led Martin Luther into the light of the truth that produced the Protestant Reformation.

Luther confessed later that he had always hated the expression “the righteousness of God,” for it suggested to him a stern judge, waiting to hurl thunderbolts of judgment down on helpless, disobedient men.

Through his study of the Psalms in 1514 he learned that the righteousness of God was related to **man’s deliverance**, not man’s condemnation. Commenting on his experience years later in 1545, Luther said,

“As violently as I had formerly hated the expression ‘righteousness of God,’ so I was now as violently compelled to embrace the new conception of grace and, for me, the expression of the Apostle really opened the Gates of Paradise.”

The righteousness of God, then, is the key to salvation. Those who have it know the power of God in personal salvation, and they know that they are “right before God” because of God’s grace demonstrated on the cross. Those who do not have it are lost and are not right before him.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The children of Israel were to return to God’s covenant of grace that we see through the whole Bible. They had thrown off grace and were living under a messy **syncretistic** works salvation.

**How About You?**

Are you living in the grace and love of Christ? We should have more zeal for God because we realize His love for us. “I still love you” (Mal 1:2). God said it to Israel and He says it to you. Don’t stop reflecting on God’s grace!

**Neh 8:10**, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

**Rom. 5:20** answers what we do with the guilt of sin now that we are saved. “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**Rom. 6:1-4**, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

The children of Israel in Malachi’s day were just giving up and giving in to paganism. Grace will keep you from the flesh and the world and the devil!

1. Don’t break my covenant with **Moses** (Mal 2:11-12).

**Malachi 2:11-12**, “Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has **married the daughter of a foreign god**. 12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!”

Malachi then deals with the ramifications of their unfaithfulness to God when it comes to their marriages. Verse 11 says that they have committed "an abomination" by having "married the daughter of a foreign god." They are marrying women who worship "gods" other than the God of Israel.

**Breaking the Law of Moses**

The Law of Moses is a law of love. Matthew 22:36-40, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

**The Bible is against Interfaith Marriages**

Baldwin argues that the issue is not interracial marriages, but interfaith marriages. She writes:

“There was no objection on racial grounds to intermarriage. A mixed multitude went out of Egypt with the Israelites (Ex. 12: 38), but by submitting to circumcision and keeping the passover they committed themselves to the God of Israel (Ex. 12: 48; Nu. 9: 14). Boaz married Ruth the Moabitess, but she had forsaken Chemosh for Israel's God.”

Israel’s covenant relationship with God meant he was their God and they were his people. To safeguard that relationship God commanded them not to intermarry with the surrounding nations who worshipped other gods (Deut. 7:3–4).

**The Practice Widespread**

But this forbidden practice had now become so widespread that the prophet could legitimately say that the whole nation of Judah had ‘profaned’ the Lord’s institution. What was Malachi saying? The Lord’s institution was his covenant relationship with his people, whom he loved, and that relationship was now being **contaminated by the men of the nation treating their marriages so casually**.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The modern equivalent to a mixed marriage is a believer marrying an unbeliever. The apostle Paul pointedly says:

**2 Cor. 6:14–16**, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

1. Don’t break my covenant of **marriage** (Mal 2:13-16a).

**Malachi 2:13-16a**, “And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16a “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.”

Perhaps a better translation of verse 16 is in the New Living Translation: “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”

As we have noted, the men of Israel were divorcing their wives so they could be joined in these mixed marriages. This blatant disregard for their marriage vows, prompted God to say that he hates divorce (v. 16). It violates his ideal of oneness (vv. 10, 15; Gen. 2:24).

**God Hates Divorce**

To say God hates divorce is to say that he hates everything that leads up to divorce, which means he also hates all our failures to work towards real companionship and oneness in marriage. We may be inclined to think that what goes on in our homes doesn’t have any bearing on the rest of life, but it does. Here in Malachi’s day we find men going to meet the Lord at the temple, and the Lord points them back to their homes. Family life colours and influences every other part of life.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Your Marriage Reflects Your Walk with God**

Your relationships in your home are connected to your relationship with God. Consider **1 Peter 3:7**, “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.”

**Marriage Not Simply a Social Arrangement**

Marriage is not simply a social arrangement constructed by men. It is the design of God himself (Gen. 2:21–24).

*One Man, One Wife.* Malachi makes it clear that God not only designed marriage, but he also designed it in a certain way. He calls attention to the fact that at the beginning God created only one companion for Adam. He could, of course, have created many women. Malachi says God had ‘a remnant of the Spirit’.

In other words, God’s creative acts in no way diminished his power or ability. He still had plenty of power after he created to create more. After he took Eve from Adam’s side, God’s power was in no way depleted or expended. He could have made more wives for Adam. In making Eve alone, then, the Lord was making it plain that his design for marriage was for a man to have one wife.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Harm to the Children**

Another harmful effect of this faithless dealing had to do with the children involved. Why did God want his people to be faithful to their marriages? Malachi’s answer is this: ‘He seeks godly offspring’ (v. 15).

God himself is faithful, and he desires for us to be faithful as well. One of the ways we learn faithfulness is by seeing it at work in the home. If God had designed marriage in such a way that a man would not have to be faithful to one woman, the offspring of that marriage would not learn faithfulness.

One commentator, Joyce Baldwin writes:

Only when both parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can the children be given the security which provides the basis for godly living. The family was intended to be the school in which God’s way of life was practiced and learned.…[[7]](#footnote-7)

John Benton says of the Lord:

He is seeking godly offspring. He is looking for our children to become disciples. Of course, there is no guarantee that children of Christian parents will automatically embrace the faith of their parents … But we must realize that an unhappy Christian marriage, where the thought life (and therefore probably the words and actions) of the partners is far from perfect harmony, will be a profound obstacle to our children becoming Christians.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Let me answer some hard questions about divorce and remarriage, and then challenge you and tell you ultimately why faithfulness in marriage is so important.

**Questions**

**Does God ever permit divorce?**

There is not perfect agreement on this, but most Bible teachers agree that divorce is permitted for two reasons: unrepentant adultery and desertion by an unbeliever.

1. Unrepentant **adultery**.

**Matthew 19:9**, “whoever divorces his wife, except for **sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery.”

The key is the interpretation of the word “sexual immorality” which is the Greek word *pornea*. Most agree that it is more than just adultery, because he could have said “adultery”, but it is at minimum unrepentant adultery and includes devious sexual sins.

2. **Desertion** by an unbeliever.

**1 Corinthians 7:15**, “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.” This does not often mean that the unbeliever has asked for a divorce. Examples of unbelievers who have left the marriage would be:

* An abuser (physically violent or sexually deviant)
* A railer (verbally abusive to the point of sociopathic behavior)

**What About Unbiblical Divorce?**

If remarriage in any other circumstance is adultery, what about those that have remarried without biblical grounds?What should they do?

I do not think that a person who remarries against God’s will, and thus commits adultery in this way, should later break the second marriage.

**Deuteronomy 24:1-4** forbids one who is remarried to go back and marry his first wife. This tells us that God recognizes the second marriage.

In other words, the marriage should not have been done, but now that it is done, it should not be undone by man. It is a real marriage. Real vows have been made and sexual union has happened. And that real covenant of marriage may be purified by the blood of Jesus and set apart for God.

I don’t think that a couple who repents and seeks God’s forgiveness, and receives his cleansing, should think of their lives as ongoing adultery, even though, in the eyes of Jesus, that’s how the relationship started.

**God Hates Divorce**

God hates divorce and so “What God has joined together, let not man separate.” Lifelong monogamy was God’s original design of Genesis 2.

1. By God’s grace, keep **covenant** (Mal 2:16b).

**Malachi 2:16b**, “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

Twice in this passage Malachi urges his people to ‘take heed’ to their spirits so that they would not ‘deal treacherously’ (vv. 15, 16).

In these words, the prophet registers his conviction that the problem of unfaithfulness is rooted in man’s spirit or heart. This is a much-needed corrective. We live in an age when people seek to excuse their unfaithfulness on the basis of their circumstances. But Malachi will have none of this. Unfaithfulness in every area of life flows from a heart that is not right with God. For this reason, the author of Proverbs urges:

“Keep your heart with all

diligence, For out of it spring the issues

of life” (Prov. 4:23).

**Conclusion**

If our hearts are not right with God, there’s only one way to get them right and that is by repentance of sin. Repentance is necessary for the sinner to become a Christian, and repentance is necessary for the Christian who has strayed from the Lord.

The men of Malachi’s generation had a clear and distinct law from God regarding marriage. Now the question before these men was what would they do about that law? Would they resent it and fly in the face of it? Or would they submit to it?[[9]](#footnote-9)

1. Cheung, Vincent (2014-11-26). Commentary On Malachi (Kindle Locations 1167-1170). Lulu.com. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Baker, D. W. (2006). *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi* (p. 251). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Johnson, S. Lewis; Johnson, S. Lewis (2014-11-25). Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul (p. 28). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Ellsworth. *Opening up Malachi* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007), 53-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ellsworth, Malachi, 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Baldwin, Malachi, 240–241. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Benton, Losing Touch, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ellsworth. Malachi, 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)