

Faithfulness in Marriage

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of faithfulness in marriage, extending beyond just the marital relationship to all interactions and ultimately to one's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The message delves into the consequences of being unfaithful, highlighting the need to guard one's spirit, watch over one's heart, and prioritize God's commands and teachings. Through various Bible verses and examples, the sermon urges couples to prioritize their relationship with God, maintain open communication, resolve conflicts, and pray together regularly to strengthen their marriage.

Scripture: Malachi 2:16, Proverbs 4:23, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Peter 3:7, Deuteronomy 4:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Proverbs 7:4

Topics: "Faithfulness in Relationships", "Prioritizing God in Marriage"

Description

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Transcript

Well, this morning, I want to preach to you about faithfulness in marriage. Faithfulness in marriage. And it goes, obviously, beyond marriage.

It deals with being faithful in every relationship in your life. And ultimately, faithful in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Right? So before Bethany and I got married, I wanted some marriage counseling from her dad.

And so I went to Bob Jennings and asked for his advice on marriage. And he quoted one verse to me. One verse from the Old Testament on marriage.

What verse do you think it was? No, not in Genesis. Not a proverb. It says, guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

Where's that at? Where's that from? Guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. Now, Ecclesiastes. Turn to Malachi.

Malachi 2. If you're a new Christian, Malachi is the book right before the beginning of the New Testament. So if you find Matthew, go to the left, you'll find Malachi. This is the verse Bob quoted to me.

Now, in the book of Malachi, you find Malachi, meaning messenger, delivering an oracle to the people of Judah from God. And he reproves this nation of Judah on multiple matters because of their disobedience, three of which are found in chapter 2. And they revolve around marriage and your relationship with those in the community. For us, it would be within the church.

Israel is not the church. But within Israel, within Judah, there were true Christians. You don't want to think about Israel and think it's parallel to the church.

That's not the case. There are true Christians within a nation where the majority were lost. So Malachi 2. We're going to read verses 10-16.

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another? So here we see this dishonesty, this faithlessness, this breaking of faith within the whole community, right? With one another. Profaning the covenant of our fathers. 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. The Lord loves. And what have they done? And has married the daughter of a foreign god.

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. So you've got people marrying unbelievers, you could say. Verse 13, and this second thing you do, you cover the Lord's altars with tears, with weeping and groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

So God's not hearing them and they say, but you say, why does He not hear us? Answer, 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. 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. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, he covers his garments with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless.

Let's pray. Father, Lord, I thank You for this day that You've given us to gather here to stir each other up. Lord, we think about the brethren in Canada.

They have fences around their building that they cannot even go and meet there. But Lord, we thank You. The church is not about a building.

The body can gather in a barn, in a field, in a house. And Lord, here we gather in this old grocery store, used to be a funeral home, old auto mechanic place. Lord, here we are in these four walls in this 6,000 square feet of a room.

We're here to worship You, to praise You. And Lord, I pray You'd make this message effectual specifically to people here who are married and might be drifting in their marriage and their heart in some way, and they're totally blind to where that might end up. And so Lord, I pray You'd use this to quicken them, Lord,

to guard themselves, to take watch, careful watch, that they not end up like these people here in this chapter.

And so Lord, we just ask for Your help and grace in Jesus' name, Amen. So the Lord gives a solution, you could say, to this specific problem of unfaithfulness in marriage. Unfaithfulness in marriage and other relationships.

We read it right there, v. 15. He says there, "...So, guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth." And we're going to look at what it means to guard yourselves in your spirit, but not yet. Not yet.

What I want you to think first about here is this, don't think about this passage as something that is totally irrelevant to you if you're single. Don't think about it as totally irrelevant to you because you think your marriage is okay right now. Right? Don't push this off to the side.

This phrase, guard yourself, it could be rendered take heed. And that should bring to your mind what Scripture in the New Testament talks about taking heed. Think of one.

1 Corinthians 10. 12. What does that say? Let anyone who thinks, right? So in his head, he thinks something.

He thinks, I'm okay. Let anyone who thinks, he stands. Take heed.

Be very careful lest he fall. Right? And that's talking about Israel. Israel.

We're given an example of Israel and their sin. And it's an example for us to pay careful attention. Same thing here at Malachi.

This is something for you and I to pay careful attention here to what is said. And the Christian life in its entirety is one where you're constantly taking heed to different things. You're being careful.

You're not ignoring the warnings. You're not saying these things don't apply to you. You're looking at it and you're not being overly introspective, but you're looking at it and saying, where might this fit in my heart and my life right now? Don't be faithless.

The text says don't break faith. Don't stop trusting the Lord. Not just in marriage.

The bigger picture ultimately is not being faithless to the Lord. So you're going to find in this message, this is basically, in some ways, it's going to be a warning to every husband here that we must constantly be on guard and wives be constantly on guard of developing any type of negative attitude towards your spouse. I mean, any.

Is there some negative attitude that is starting to develop? Are you paying careful attention to where that might head? This is going to be an admonishment to us, as one said, to watch for the first stirrings of resentment, which might turn into dislike, and you've got to repent of it immediately lest you deal treacherously with the wife whom God has given you to be a blessing. We've got to watch out. It doesn't say guard your body.

It says guard yourselves and your spirit. Everything starts internally. That's where it all is starting.

It's inside. It's inside. Now, why speak on this? This is what, number one, I wanted to study it more because it was the one text Bob Jennings gave me as marital advice, right? But a second thing, eight years ago, I was at a conference.

And I was single. I was staying in the dorms at this conference. And I remember leaving the conference or leaving the dorm to go to the main meeting area, and I saw this couple walking across the field.

They were holding hands. They were an older couple. Holding hands.

They had this big smile on their face. She was shorter. She kind of looked up to him.

They just seemed so... It felt like they were high school sweethearts. Just so in love. And at that point in their marriage, you know what? That really was legitimate.

Fast forward eight years. I was at that same conference recently. And I see that same person.

His wife was not with him. And he told me, he said, I want you to hear it from my own lips, but my wife and I currently are separated. Now he said, there's hope that things will be resolved, but we're currently separated.

He didn't share all the details, but what he shared, it stood out. He said to me, we had conflicts. We kind of stopped getting them resolved.

We started to grow distant. We stopped hugging and resolving things the very day it happened. I lowered our standard of church.

There wasn't a really good church in the city, so I kind of lowered the standard. Well, then what happened was that teaching influenced my family in such a way where when I wanted to lead them out of the church to a good church and move cities, they didn't want to listen. Because I had put them under this certain teaching for a period of time.

It was very shocking, this conversation. Very shocking to me. My wife and I were sober that this happened to this couple.

I would never have perceived it. I never would have imagined seeing him there without his wife and some separation. Now may God restore that.

May the Lord indeed do that. But think of this, current failures in my life, in your life, if undealt with, they can chip away at the foundation that sin, your spouse, can tolerate for a decade. Can they tolerate it for two decades? Or are you going to deal with that thing? Because it eventually might cause something greater to happen.

The husband who always defends himself and his pride, the wife who always curls and tears her husband down with his words. You think, well, we've been doing that. That's been happening to some degree for five years.

Ten years. Fifteen years. Twenty years.

You know what might happen at 25 years? The marriage dissolves. Divorce happens. Separation.

Because that thing that seemed minor and you didn't pay careful attention to, it eroded everything away slowly, and you didn't see this distance in your heart happening between you and your spouse and eventually got to that point where it's very easy to go talk to someone else and commit emotional adultery and that eventually leads to physical adultery and eventually leads to divorce. Don't underestimate sin, you see. Don't underestimate it.

We should be sobered up. In different examples in church history, different examples of people we know, different examples even of what's happening here in Malachi are a very stern warning to us to pay careful attention. To not be the arrogant man like Peter who says, I'll never do something.

It's only by the grace of God that this will never happen in my marriage or this will never happen in my marriage. So, I want you to think this morning, how's your relationship with your spouse? But more than that, how's your relationship with one another, right? Because he says right here in verse 10, they were faithless to one another. So this was happening within the community as a whole.

They were faithless to one another. The leaders were failing them. Look at verse eight.

Look what happened with the priest. The priest, rather than turning many away from sin, as it says in verse 6, they were turning aside from the way. 2.8, they had caused many to stumble by their instruction.

They had corrupted the covenant of Levi. So the leadership was sinning against the people. Purity was just crumbling.

And it seems Malachi was written prior to Ezra. I mean, Ezra spans many years, and so it's hard to date some of it. But if you remember in Ezra, they had the same problem of people being faithless by marrying people who worshiped a pagan god.

And what happens when you marry someone who worships a pagan god? They introduced destructive teachings of paganism into the nation. And in Ezra 9, it said the people of Israel and the priest, they didn't separate themselves from the peoples of the land with their abominations. They took some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and their sons, so the holy race was mixed itself with the peoples of the land and in this, the faithlessness of the hand of the officials and the chief men was for most.

So you've got leadership here sinning against the people by their compromises. And obviously, this is not forbidding interracial marriage. It's not what is happening here.

The issue is, these people worshiped a false god. And marrying that unbeliever, you're yoking yourself to someone who believes something that hates God and is anti-God. You have no guarantee they're ever going to be converted.

Now, some people, they hear something like this in 1 Corinthians 7, and what do they think they should do? If they marry someone lost, they think they should divorce them. What does Paul say to do? No, you don't divorce them. But purity is crumbling.

People are abandoning and divorcing their wife. It even says in 3.5, he talks about drawing near in judgment and he says, I will bring a swift witness against the sorcerers against the adulterers. Okay, so you've got the leadership failing here.

You've got people marrying unbelievers. I'll say it like that. You've got people leaving their wife and divorcing her to go marry someone else.

And you've got people who are just committing adultery. That's what's happening here in Malachi 2. And he says, guard yourselves, take heed to your spirit and so not be faithless to the wife of your youth. Now, this passage does not deal with the case of a man divorcing a wife who's already broken her marriage vows.

So this is not about, you don't want to take Malachi 2 and say, well, this should be understood as an absolute condemnation of any divorce whatsoever. That's not what's happening in Malachi 2. The idea is there's a man here who's going to divorce his wife on a whim. There's no reason for that to be happening.

This is grieving. This is very grieving. Is this divorce that this man's doing, is this marrying a pagan woman, is this just some isolated incident? Or are there other things surrounding that that are actually making that acceptable within the nation of Judah at this point? There's other things happening.

There's other things happening. We don't want to think that this is just isolated. There are more factors at play in the nation of Judah that have led up to marriage being taken lightly.

The same thing can happen to you and I. Certain things happen, a lot of it through the teaching you hear that could cause you to take marriage in a lighter way than what God has said in His Word. And so we always have to think ahead. You don't just think when the building is crumbling, you think of everything that led up to that point of deteriorating to the point where it falls.

You want to prevent that. It's right to be in a preventative mode constantly in the Christian life. And so first, I want to consider eight statements, eight statements of Malachi responding to something that the people are saying.

That the people are saying. And he gives a response. In these eight statements, the reason we're going to look at them is they show areas where these people are drifting that is leading to the point where they're going to divorce their wife, they're going to marry an unbeliever, they're going to not be faithful in their community relationships.

You see, you don't just focus on those things and say, well, don't divorce, don't do this. What is leading to that happening? Where are they drifting at? So we're going to look at those eight things really briefly and then we'll go from there. So the first one is in Malachi 1.2. So if you've got your Bible, you can read these with me.

Malachi 1.2. The Lord says, I have loved you. Says the Lord. What's their response? This is the first where it says, but you say.

He's a very good preacher. He takes their statements and he puts them out there and then he's dealing with those statements. He's reproofing them.

What were the people saying? What type of questioning of God was going on among the nation? How have you loved? That's what they're saying to God. The people are saying to the Lord, how have you loved us? The Lord says, I've loved you. The people say, how? How have you loved us? And he goes on.

The response is, is not Esau Jacob's brother? I mean, I've loved Jacob. That's within the nation they are with, but Esau I've hated. I've laid waste to his hill country.

Not to you guys. I've left his heresies to the jackals. If Edom says we're shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins.

The Lord of Hosts says they may build, but I will tear down. Verse 5, it goes on, your own eyes shall see this and you shall say, great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. They don't understand everything that happened with Edom and its destruction and with Esau and the select love that God had on them as a nation.

It's like they're totally forgetting what happened in the past and the love of God for them as a nation. Right? That can happen in your life. Don't forget.

There might be some resentment or something happening in your marriage. Don't forget the goodness of God and all that He has done for you. Don't get to a point where you question the love of God.

Don't say to the Lord, how have You loved us? He's written it out very clearly here in His Word. Don't question. This is like the child that's getting spanked.

And what's their manipulative response to the parent afterwards? You don't love me. If you loved me, you would not spank me. No, no, no, no.

I'm spanking you because I love you. I'm disciplining you because I love you. So whatever economic and social problems they were having, they're blaming them on the Lord.

Is it the Lord's fault? Has God changed here? No. 3.6, He says, for I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, you're not consumed.

I've not changed. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's not changed right here.

So that's the first thing. They basically have lost sight of what God has done for them. They're ignorant of history.

They're unstudied. And that's one of the things leading to this mindset is these priests being like that. And think of this.

What happens if you lose the motivation of God's love for you as a reason to obey Him? What's going to happen to your obedience? It's going to shred away very quickly. But when you're believing how much God loves you, that He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how much more will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? When you're believing those realities, you have a motivation, His love for you to go and live for Him. They don't have that.

They don't have that. So don't lose your motivation of love. Don't question the Lord's love.

That's the first thing that happens. Second, look in 1.6. Again, we're looking at, because they're divorcing one another, it's not isolated. There are things that have led to it.

We want to get the big picture here. We want to look at the areas that were deteriorating around them that led to the sin. Because that's what happens in you and I's lives, right? It's not some isolated incident.

Something was a root that popped up and led to it. So the second one, Malachi 1.6, A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I then am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priest who despised My name.

But you say... this is what they're saying. How have we despised Your name? What are we doing wrong? How? Answer, by offering polluted food upon My altar. Wow, look at their answer.

They're about to say, Lord, You're right. How could we do such a wicked thing? Is that what they say? No, look what they say. But you say, how? How? How? How? How have we polluted Your name? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised.

How are they doing that? Well, they're going and offering blind animals in sacrifice. Is that not evil? When you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? And they come to find out they even have a healthy animal and they vowed it, but then they don't offer that one. So this is the second thing.

They're ignoring God's command and they're not owning up to their own disobedience. This is the leaders. You've got leaders in a nation not owning up to their own disobedience.

It makes me think about the family, right? If I as the leader of my house don't own up to my own disobedience that my children clearly see, it's going to teach my children that that disobedience is no small thing. But here you've got married people and in this nation, you've got leaders here who are saying how, how, and they're just dismissing and not acknowledging how they are dishonoring and disobeying God. Is that a small thing? No.

Is it a small thing to question the love of God? How is He loved us? Is it a small thing to not know history and not be studied and know the love of God? No. These things are two things so far that are deteriorating true views of marriage. And this obviously has happened in our own country and nation today.

They're expecting we can put aside sacrificial laws right here and God's just going to be gracious to us. It's no big deal. It's no big deal.

They view sin so lightly. And you know what should happen? Verse 10, the Lord says this, He says, oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain. Shut the doors.

You know, there's a lot of shutting the doors going on right now in America, right? With COVID. There's a lot of church doors getting shut. Well, here, God actually wants it to happen.

One of the blessings of the coronavirus is that some churches that don't have a sound truth, they find by shutting the doors, when they open them again, people aren't even wanting to come back because they've learned they can live life without the local church. In some ways, a blessing in disguise to kind of dismember certain bodies that are not really being faithful to the Lord. But here, you see right here, how have we polluted your name? How have we despised your name? You see here a spiritual disease of apathy that is far worse than COVID or any plague.

What I want you to think about this morning is not shutting the physical door of a building that someone calls a church. I'm thinking, don't shut the door of your heart. Specifically to you who are married.

Don't let any type of resentment or something build up between you and your wife. And you look at that thing and you minimize it and you say it's minor, you say it's insignificant. You and I have no idea where that's going to take us.

David had no idea by not going to war when he should that he'd end up in adultery and a murderer. We can't underestimate sin. And I'm going to have an encouraging note in the end to rest in faith in the Lord and not be overly analytical.

But bear with me now as I exhort you. Okay? Because we need both. Okay, third thing here.

Again, why are we leaving chapter 2? We're looking at the big picture. That's what we need to do in our own lives in regards to our own marriage and our own relationships with people within this community. We've got to look at the big picture.

Malachi 1.13 The Lord just said in verse 11 He wants His name to be great among the nations. But what do they do? You profane My name. When you say the Lord's table is polluted and its fruit and its food may be despised.

Verse 13, but you say... This is their response. What a weariness this is. Wait, what is? My name will be great among the nations, says the Lord, but you profane My name.

What a weariness it is to make God's name great among the nations. What a weariness it is to fear the Lord. That's creeping into them.

Are you weary of fearing God? Are you weary of making God's name great among the nations? But you say what a weariness is this and you snort at it. I will not snort right now. I don't know what that sounded like.

That's where their hearts are at. You can see it's pretty obvious they're in a group of Judah where people are divorcing one another. People are marrying unbelievers.

Adultery is going on, right? Bad doctrine. Bad teaching. Bad leadership.

It leads to all of that. It takes part in it. No, you can't excuse your sin because of it.

You're ultimately responsible for your sin. But bad company with false teachers corrupts good morals. 1 Corinthians 15 says that.

That's what is hitting on there in that chapter. So here we have this third thing. They're tired of fearing God.

It's weary to them. They're weary of doing it. And look at v. 14.

He says, "...cursed to be the cheat who has a male in his flock." And he vows it. I've got this lamb. I vow.

I will go offer this lamb. And yet, he sacrifices the Lord what is blemished. Imagine, I'm going to vow this lamb, everyone.

And then you go and you see me in the temple and I go take that other lamb. I go put that on the offering. What are you going to think about me? Well, that guy doesn't keep his word.

He's a liar. This is their leadership who is doing these things. They don't view God as a great king.

So, that's what he deals with in the first two chapters leading up to v. 10. It deals with the priest, which is the leadership in the nation of Judah, you could say. And so the parallel for us, I realize we're all priests in the New Testament in the spiritual realm.

But you could say one parallel is pastors in a church. The spiritual leadership is helping drive them to doubt God's love, to not fear God, for their testimony to be disintegrating among the nations. The priest, look what it says in 2.2. They did not take it to heart to give honor to My name.

They don't lay it to heart. They don't take it seriously. Clearly, by their conduct, they're helping to destroy these people and their marriages.

It says in 2.9, at the end, he says, but you show partiality in your instruction. And so you've got priests just kind of like those pick-and-choose. I mean, I know the law says give that one that has no blemish.

But I really want to have that one for myself. I want to do this with that one. So I'm going to give that one with a blemish.

So I can show partiality, right? I don't have to take God seriously with what He has said. No, no, that's wrong. We've got to run from that.

What time is it? 1030. Okay. I'm just making sure.

I maybe should skip some. These things here, the fourth thing, they're complaining to God in 2.13. They're groaning that the Lord no longer hears them. And it's interesting if you look at v. 13, right? With weeping and groaning because He no longer guards the sacrifices.

And they say in v. 14, but why does He not? And then the answer is because the Lord is witness between you and your wife and your youth. What passage does that remind you of? You're offering something to God and He doesn't hear you because of your marriage. Yeah, 1 Peter 3. Very much similar idea.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel, since there abides with you the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered. You don't live with your wife in an understanding way. Access to God is cut off until you resolve this.

Similar idea here. Access isn't cut off. It's not going to be effectual until you deal with that blemish that needs to be dealt with.

So these people though, in general, look, these people are divorcing one another. As we've already seen, they're going in a clear opposite direction of what's clearly written in the Scriptures leading up to this point. They're clearly ignoring the Word and the standard of God.

They go on to say where's the God of justice? They go on to say to not acknowledge their sin. In the 8th thing, they go on, maybe just look at the 8th thing, 3.13, look what they say to the Lord. The Lord says, but your words have been hard against Me.

What's their response? Imagine the Lord telling you through a prophet that your words have been hard. Your words have been hard against Me, says the Lord. What would your response be? But they say, how have we spoken against you? Man, are these guys blind or what? That's what sin does.

It blinds you. Look what they go on to say, verse 14. The Lord says, you have said, it is vain, it is empty, it is useless to serve God.

What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as His mourning before the Lord of hosts? And then they go on basically to believe that the arrogant are the ones who are prospering. You notice what thinking has been allowed in their minds? Do you have any remnants of any of this in your mind this morning? Are you questioning God's love? Do you see it as non-existent? Are you ignoring God's commands? Are you showing partiality in picking and choosing what to teach on based on what benefits you? Are you weary of fearing God? Are you complaining to God? Are you saying it's okay to live in sin? That's what they say there, look, 2.17. They said, it's amazing, these guys... But you say, how have we wearied Him? Like, Lord, why are You wearied by us? By saying, v. 17, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. What? It's like they don't even recognize that.

They're going out there and saying if you do evil, it's good. And God does what in you? Delights. I mean, isn't that incredible? That's how dark it is getting.

They don't believe God is a God of justice. They don't acknowledge sin. They speak hard words against the Lord.

They believe it is in vain to serve Him. So that's the big picture here. There's always a big picture.

When you're doing marriage counseling with someone, there's a big picture. They're talking about, well, we have this thing going on and there's this and that. It's like, you know what? I want to step back.

I want to get a big view of everything. And who knows? Maybe in the midst of that problem was the husband leaving his wife to a not-so-good church and that not-so-good church impacted her doctrinally in a not-so-good way. It affected her thinking and that's part of what's at the root of their marriage problem.

I mean, who knows where it's coming from? And you're trying in that conversation to take every one of their thoughts and obedience to Christ and trying to destroy everything that's brought against the knowledge of God. That's what you're trying to do. You're in a war.

And the weapons of your warfare, it's not a sword. It's not a gun. It's the sword of the Spirit.

It's the one book God has given us. It's His one standard. Here we have it.

Right here. Before us. But it's no wonder people were divorcing their wives and marrying unbelievers, right? I mean, if the leadership was this bad, if these thoughts were so permeated into their mind, it's pretty obvious.

If you're believing God doesn't keep His covenant because that's what the priests are saying to you, why should you keep your covenant? If the priest makes a vow over there that he's going to offer a certain lamb and then he doesn't, and then God doesn't strike him dead on the spot, well, then, do I have to keep my marriage vows? It looks like no punishment's going to come. You see, fear of God is not there. They don't even blush, as Jeremiah said.

They definitely don't hold in honor the marriage bed above all. And one day, God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. He's going to judge them.

Okay, so that's the bigger picture here. How they got to the point of saying divorce is good in God's sight. And again, we're getting to that.

In America, there's all sorts of garbage that's being said that's totally anti-biblical. Marriage is okay. It's common.

I mean, of course marriage is okay. Divorce. We're in a culture that says what is evil is good.

And what is good is evil and bigoted. Just think for a moment about how the Lord describes marriage here. And there's too much to get in in some of these verses.

In verse 15, there's like six different views on what it means. And my purpose of this sermon is not to overly dive in to verse 6. I want us to look at this exhortation to guard yourselves. That's where we're headed.

And part of guarding yourselves is not just focusing inward, but look at your surrounding circumstances. Look at the teaching that is being intaked into your head, into your mind, into your heart, because that's a factor. That's what is a factor here for these individuals.

But He says marriage is becoming one. Verse 15, did He not make them one? Maybe alluding to Adam and Eve. God made them one with a portion of the Spirit.

A portion of the Spirit was involved in this union that took place between Adam and Eve. And what was the one God's seeking? Godly offspring. Is that ultimately pointing to the Godly offspring? The greatest offspring to ever come is the Lord Jesus Christ? But marriage is, you're making them one.

And it seems at this point in Malachi's day, there's not a lot of evidence that polygamy was going on. It seems like that's dying out. Where you have multiple wives.

Again, God legislated that, but in the beginning, we find very clear that was not what God desired. We find here marriage is companionship. Look at 2.14. He says, though she is your companion.

Your wife is your companion. A lexicon, it says a companion is one you have fellowship. You share something in common.

They're your partner. You're one with them. You're sharing your life with them.

It's not you living your life individually. If you're married, it's you and them together as one. You're one person.

Are you living in that type of way? Companion. Marriage is a covenant. It says right here.

A covenant. It's a contract, a vow, a commitment before the living God. You see that in the wedding ceremonies.

There's a biblical basis for that reality. You're making this commitment. You're saying these things before the living God.

And who is the one who actually witnesses against these people for breaking it? Isn't it interesting here? It's God. Verse 14, the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth. God's the one who witnesses.

He witnessed it on that day. He witnesses it when someone breaks that vow, that commitment. And then He even says here, the wife of your youth.

We're thinking about marriage. Your wife of your youth. Implying they're older now.

It was the wife of my youth. She's no longer young. Marriage, God intends it to be till you die.

It's about being faithful as you get older in marriage. That older couple I talked to, again, I never imagined they would have been separated. Thank God they're not divorced, but just being separated was surprising to me.

A lot of us are younger couples here. Where are we going? Are you guarding yourself? Are you paying careful attention? Are you minimizing things that might be crumbling the foundation away in a way you don't recognize? I mean, these people were so blind in Malachi's day. We often just assume we're not blind and that's our pride.

But we have a conversation with someone and we compare our marriage to someone else's and we're like, wow, I've got a lot of growth that I need. I was content if everything was okay and it apparently is not. Okay.

Much more could be said on this. Do you remember Abraham? Abraham, he wasn't faithless. Faithful.

He wasn't faithful. He went and married Hagar to have a child. He should have trusted God to provide Isaac through whom God said He would.

Okay, so the exhortation. Here the exhortation is. We find it these two times in the text.

So guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. And then at the end of 16, so guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. First, again, we're commanded to take watch.

We're commanded to guard. Are you guarding your marriage, your heart? Right? Guarding it. Are you guarding? Is there any type of defense? Is there any type of garrison that is taking place there? Are you taking heed? Are you paying careful attention to watch your spirit? Not your physical body.

Watching what goes on in here and here. How do you think? How do you process things? What do you believe? What do you believe about God? What do you believe about others? This word, with your spirit, Paul signs off multiple letters. He makes this statement.

He says, the Lord be with your spirit. The Lord be with your spirit. What does it mean? I mean, the Lord be with your spirit.

I don't think it's that complicated. The idea is it's talking about the Lord be with you as a person internally, in your heart, your inner man, your conscience. May the Lord be with your life.

Because what goes on in here manifests itself in how you live. So he's saying take watch over your life. We find that throughout Scripture, this idea, this guarding of our thoughts, our minds, our heart, this whole inner man, this whole spirit that is within us, this soul that God has given us.

We hear this in Luke 21. Watch yourselves, lest your heart be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

So watch yourselves. Your heart has the ability. You could be weighed down with discouragement and it's so hard.

It's tough. There's trials as a Christian. Isn't it interesting? The seed gets sown and what happens? Some, it sprouts up with joy, they receive it, but in a time of testing, they fall away.

Right? Trials are a time to all the more go to the Lord. These people were not on guard, and thus they let false teaching affect their mind, calm their conscience, and they could go and divorce their wife. Maybe even they had an emotional affair first.

They started talking to someone too much in a private way of the opposite gender, and they love talking to that person more than their own spouse, and their hearts started getting fused together, and that emotional affair formed in the heart with that co-worker or whoever, and their heart starts drifting. They didn't guard themselves. They didn't watch what came into that heart.

They didn't notice that little resentment or that discontentment about how their spouse looked that crept into their heart, and they coddled that and said, oh, this is an okay thing to have. It's okay for me to be discontent about how my spouse looks. I'm just going to feed this thing more and more.

It will take you to a place you do not want to go. It all goes downhill from there. You read it.

Job, Eliphaz, he kind of has an insight on this when he says, why does your heart carry you away? Why do your eyes flash that you turn your spirit against God, and you bring such words out of your mouth? Now, in many ways, he was wrong with what he said to Job. But there's something true in what he's saying here. You turn your spirit against God.

Whatever guarding your spirit is, it's guarding your perception of who God is. It's guarding the teaching that comes into your life. It's guarding whether or not you have resentment and bitterness towards God.

It's guarding whether you question God's love for you or not. Is your heart carrying you away at all? Is there any thought of saying, Lord, how have You loved me? Is there any thought of despising His holiness? You know, the priests were doing the opposite. They were uncommitted.

They didn't keep their word. They were liars. If you guard your heart, if you guard your spirit, you know what you're going to do? You're going to do the opposite.

You're going to be committed. You're going to keep your word, and you're going to be honest. The one who is faithless, they break.

They break the faith. They stop being faithful. They stop being honest.

They make a promise. They don't keep their word. And remember, these priests, they were not guarding something.

Look at 2.7. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge. They weren't guarding knowledge. They were causing many to stumble by their instruction.

Causing many to stumble by they were not protecting or taking heed to their teaching, and they led people to stumble. How important is doctrine to you? Part of guarding yourselves and your spirit is guarding what you believe. What do you believe about God? And that affects how you live, right? Faith without works is dead.

How you live reveals what you believe. Because doctrine is fueling your life. 1 Timothy 4. Same idea.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this. Why? For by so doing, you will save, persevere, both yourselves and your hearers to the end.

Are you constantly guarding what you believe? Again, that's where they went wrong. The big picture here is they went off in their doctrine because they had priests who were not teaching what was true and that lowered the standard of holiness. It affected their life and they were able to divorce their wives.

So one big application from all of this is how important it is for you to be in a church. If you're visiting with us today, you know what? It matters what church you're in. What church you're in could be a defining factor whether you get divorced or not 20 years down the road, because what they're teaching is either going to increase the fear of God in your life or going to minimize it.

And that will affect your conduct because doctrine affects how you live. So, it's not just you're guarding, but guarding means you're living out what you are taking in. People say, well, I'm in a good church.

I hear good sermons. Well, are you doing what it says in 2.2? They're not taking it to heart. He goes on at the end of v. 2, I've already cursed them because they do not lay it to heart.

Are you laying it to your heart? It's like taking that forklift. When you hear that truth, you get that forklift and you have a thousand pounds of things and you lay on the ground and it's like, drop it on my heart. Just go and throw it on.

I want to feel that. I want to really believe that in here. It's very similar to Proverbs 4.23. We looked at that a month ago in the Berean Bible study on Tuesday.

Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life, and the main question we asked is how do you guard your heart? This doesn't mean you guard your heart from emotional hurt. But in the context, it's all about not forsaking wisdom, commandments, and instruction, and it's all about living out the Word and obeying the Word and loving the Word. Proverbs 4 says, she, His wisdom, the Bible, will keep you.

Love her, and she will guard you. So you want to guard yourselves? You'll love the truth. And Solomon says she'll actually guard you.

You're setting all this truth up around you so when an enemy comes, that wisdom actually stands up and it helps guard you against whatever it is down there. Proverbs 4 talks about being attentive to my words. It talks about being vigilant.

Constant intake of the Word. Think about Proverbs 7. Call wisdom an intimate friend. And what happens? She keeps you from the forbidden woman.

Who is wisdom incarnate? Christ. So put Christ in there. Call Christ your intimate friend.

And He will keep you from the forbidden woman. That's the end thing, right? This is all about, you want to guard yourselves in your spirit? You guard your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You keep a clear conscience.

You keep biblical doctrine. You keep yourself in fellowship with those who are not corrupting your morals by false teaching. And you know what's going to happen? You're going to find by the power of God, you're not going to fall into divorce from your wife.

You're not going to fall into marrying an unbeliever. You're not going to fall into all sorts of problems within the community of believers because the truth is going to be affecting your heart. It's going to be guarding you.

You're going to be taking care to keep your soul diligently. You're going to be taking care to not forget the things that you have seen and to not let them depart from your heart. Deuteronomy 4.9 Okay, concluding application here.

If you drift there in your relationship with Christ, it will obviously affect the rest of your life. So are you husbands constantly on guard against developing any type of negative attitude towards your wife? Are you free of that? Are you free of that? Are there any stirrings of resentment that are turning into some infection? It can be so small. I was tested this morning.

Very small test. My wife will rebuke me if I make it seem bigger than it was. But whether my wife was going to come to the meeting or not, how will I feel whether she chooses to come or to not come? We just had a baby a couple of days ago, right? If she chooses not to come, does that affect me in any way negatively? If she chooses to come.

What's going on in the heart? Little decisions like that, you might start to feel something where you might think less of someone, might think more of them as you should not. Little things like that. That's what we're thinking about here.

You don't just push those to the side and say, oh, it's no big deal. No, no. Do you go to bed with unresolved problems? Are you not being transparent in your marriage? Do you not hug and cuddle as much as you used to? I don't want to be at a conference one day and see you walking alone across the field because you didn't guard yourself in your spirit.

You didn't guard over your doctrine. You didn't resolve conflicts. You put things off.

And I find out 20 years from now that you had the foundation crumbling away and you didn't call for an inspection. You didn't seek to get help. You didn't deal with the problem because you were too proud, too arrogant, too blind like these people in Malachi.

I don't want that to be me. I don't want that to be you. And look, some of you, you walk alone because someone divorced you in love with their own sin.

And I want you to remember this this morning. Malachi does not condemn you. It should encourage you that you have a spouse in Christ who does not renounce His vows, who does not forsake His covenant.

You have a God who will never forsake you. The fact God hates divorce as the New King James renders it, the Lord thy God hates divorce, that's something to encourage someone who has been divorced. You

should be encouraged because it says God will never forsake you.

Because that's in His character. If He hates divorce, then that means He will not abandon me. He's going to keep me despite certain ways that I have failed.

The Lord will be faithful to me with this covenant He has made. So do you take heed? Married couples specifically. But again, think of this with any relationship.

Do you take heed and not lay stumbling blocks before one another? Do you guard so as to not cultivate hard thoughts towards one another? Do you labor to advance the fear of God in one another? Do you pray for one another in your own secret prayer times? Do you pray together? I'm amazed couples that I've talked to, they don't pray together. Do I have a verse that I can quote? Praying to the living God. We come and pray together as a church.

Are there not matters within the home, within your life where it's like let's pray together, let's commit this to the Lord. And you know what's interesting? If you've got something between your spouse, you're not going to be able to pray. You'll be there praying and the other spouse isn't praying and eventually tears come down their eyes because something's between you guys.

And that time of prayer all of a sudden exposes that. Or they harden their hearts and they pray past it, but they're not going to get on that long with that. God's going to crush them like Psalm 32 says.

You know the weaknesses, temptations of your spouse better than anyone else. So you should pray for them more than anyone else. Do you stir one another up to love and good works? Do you warn one another when something appears sinful that happened? Do you take special care when you bring things to each other to make sure no bitterness is in your heart, that your motive is right, and you're discerning this is a right season to bring to concern? Do you keep your word? Are you wrongly withholding intimacy? I mean, that's another thing that's amazed me.

There's certain couples that will not, the Bible says, withhold in agreement for a time of prayer. Right? Is that happening where you're withholding and it has nothing to do with that? Some type of punishment or whatever? May it not be so. George Mueller.

Yeah, and last thing there is something minor always ends up being something major if you don't deal with it, right? That tends to be a general rule. Listen to George Mueller. This is describing his marriage as something that can encourage us in our own marriages.

Page 234 on his biography by Pearson, I believe. This married life had advanced very near to the ideal of marital bliss by reason of common compatibility, common faith in God and love for His work and long participation in prayer and service. In their case, the days of courtship were never passed.

Indeed, the tender and delicate mutual attention of those early days rather increased rather than decreased as the years went on. And the great maxim was both proven and illustrated that the secret of winning love is the secret of keeping it. Never had his beloved Mary, his wife, been so precious to her husband as during the very year of her death.

This marriage union was so happy that Mr. Mueller could not withhold his loving witness that he never saw her at any time after she became his wife without a new feeling of delight. Look, I realize that sounds exaggerated. I don't think it is.

And day by day, they were wont to find at least a few moments of rest together sitting after dinner hand in hand in loving intercourse of mind and heart made more complete by His touch of physical contact and whether in speech or silence communing in the Lord, their happiness in God and in each other was present at all seasons of the year. It was perpetual growing as the years fled by. Mr. Mueller's solemn conviction was that all this wedded bliss was because she was not only a devoted Christian, but that their one united object as a married couple was to live only and wholly for God.

That they always had an abundance of work for God in which they were heartily united. That this work was never allowed to interfere with the care of their own souls. They didn't put ministry above the care of their own souls is what he's saying.

Or their seasons of private prayer and study of Scriptures. And that they were accustomed daily and often thrice a day to secure a time of united prayer and rapture when they brought before the Lord the matters which at that time called for thanksgiving and supplication. That's an encouragement, right? You don't want to have... I've asked married couples before, was there ever a point where you felt like your marriage was on the rocks or something? And they said never.

We should expect that. There's going to be things we've got to deal with. But, I mean, divorce isn't even an option in my mind.

I don't even think of that. We shouldn't even be thinking about that. If that's even coming into your mind, if it's two Christians, that shouldn't even be the case.

Okay, the last three minutes, the last thing is something to encourage you, an illustration, because I've exhorted you a lot, reminded you of the great need to guard yourselves. But it is by the grace of God that will help you not marry an unbeliever. That's the only way.

Ultimately, by the Lord working things to make you not do something like that if you're saved right now. If you're married to an unbeliever, pray that God would save that spouse and live out what Peter says in 1 Peter 3. One, it's the grace of God that will guide you so you don't divorce your spouse. It's the grace of God that will help you keep your commitments to one another.

And we should feel the reality of Malachi 4 too, but you shall fear My name. The sons of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

And we should be leaping around as Christians. We've been forgiven. Christ has come.

The ultimate offspring. He kept the law on our behalf. 2 Thessalonians 3 says this, but the Lord is faithful.

He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. That's my ultimate hope. The Lord's faithfulness is my hope, not my faithfulness.

Do I need to guard myself? Yes. But my ultimate hope is that the Lord will guard me. So Joel Beeky, he gives this illustration.

I once read of a young boy on board a ship being tossed mercilessly on the waves. The vessel being obviously in great peril. Not a sailor or passenger on board could hide his or her alarm, except for this boy who appeared quiet, content, quite content and happy.

Asked how he could be happy at such a time, he simply replied, what did he say? Everyone's in panic on the ship. They're in fear. You've got one boy.

He's not. Why? Why do you think he wasn't? I guess no one's heard or read this before. No one's heard or read this before.

He's content and happy. It is because he's trusting in the Lord, but it's an illustration. You know why he wasn't? Guess who the captain was? His father.

Right? And that's what's true of you and I. Your captain is the father. You can rest on the ship. Look, it's bumpy.

It's hard. The boy said my father is the captain. He knows how to manage.

He had been there enough times to know my dad's got this in control. Everyone else doesn't know the dad's character. Doesn't know how good the dad is.

Now, could that dad be arrogant? Sure. Can God be arrogant? No. God is absolutely able.

So the ship of the elect cannot go down while Christ is present and in command. Amen. Father, we do thank You that our ultimate boast and trust is in You, yet at the same time, we want to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, trusting that it is You who supernaturally work in us to will and to work for Your good pleasure.

And Lord, we want to be pleasing to You. I pray You'd keep us, keep our marriages. Lord, keep my own marriage.

Lord, I don't want to be one who stands in a pulpit, gives a message on this, and then I end up being on the other side ten years down the road and not living out the very things I've spoken this morning. And so, Lord, give us Your supernatural help. Lord, reveal.

Lord, if there are things in marriages right now that are happening that are deteriorating, if there's sayings unresolved that us pastors don't even know about in the flock, Father, I pray You'd bring that to the surface. And Lord, I think about those who've been divorced. Lord, I know two or three even here today.

Lord, I pray You'd give them grace as they trust You. You will not leave them. You are a covenant-keeping God and we praise You for that.

And Lord, those who have a lost spouse, save that spouse. Lord, save Lee. Save Emmanuel.

Lord, save Hector. Lord, be merciful. Save Santiago.

God, have mercy. Bring people out of darkness into Your light. And Lord, may they see in our lives of those who believe that God is love, is faithful.

Lord, we don't want people to look at us and think that we don't really believe You say who You are. So I pray these things because we believe who You are. You're the God who hears our prayer.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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