

April 29, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Don't Forget His People

Malachi 2:10-16

- 1. Don't Break the Bond of Community (verse 10).**
- 2. Don't Make the Bond of Lawlessness (verses 11-12).**
- 3. Don't Break the Bond of Matrimony (verses 13-16).**

A common saying in our culture is that "blood is thicker than water." When people say this, they refer to the fidelity that people have for their own relatives, which goes deeper than their friends. Friends come and friends go, but you are stuck with your relatives. You can't change your parents. You can't change your siblings. They will always be there.

One of the results of this fact is that relatives often show up to help in times of difficulty. When your sister has a baby, you will fly across the country to help her during those first few difficult days. Or when your brother is sick, you will go and visit him often or when your parents become weak and feeble, you may well bring them into your own homes to nurse them yourself.

These things are true in general. Certainly, it's not true in every circumstance. But, because they are your relatives, and because of the thickness of blood, the natural tendency of all of us is to be faithful to them.

The Bible acknowledges that faithfulness to family runs deep. But, the Bible merely acknowledges this fact, to demonstrate that there is an even stronger bond among the people of God.

Proverbs 18:24 says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." With these words, Solomon is acknowledging the fact that a brother is faithful. But, there are instances, where a friend comes along, whose faithfulness to you even exceeds the faithfulness of your own family members.

I remember golfing last summer and joining a few guys in the round. In the course of my conversations with these men during the round, I found out that these two men go way back. They have been friends for some 30-40 years. Every week (I think that it was Tuesday afternoon), they always golf together. One of them told me, "If you want to know where to find us, show up here at 3:30pm some Tuesday, and we'll be golfing together. We've done it for years. We'll continue to do it for years."

At one point, I remember having a chance to speak individually with one of these guys, while the other was off getting a drink. He said, "We are like brothers." Reflecting upon the depth of their commitment to each other, with tears in his eyes, this man said, "We would do anything for each other. I would give one of my kidneys to him, if needed. And he would do the same thing for me." Those two men were friends, who will stick closer than brothers. It's exactly what Solomon was saying. Though blood is thicker than water, there are instances where water is thicker than blood.

Jesus said the same thing. Perhaps you remember the time when Jesus was speaking to the crowds. His mother and brother were outside the home where the crowd was gathered. Someone said to Jesus, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You" (Matt. 12:47). Jesus responded by saying, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" (Matt. 12:48). "And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother'" (Matt. 12:49-50). "The bond of those in the kingdom of heaven is stronger than the bond of family." The crowds knew that the family ought to have special privileges. If they were seeking Jesus, they should be given preference. They should be able to push to the front of the crowd. They are family. They are blood. But, Jesus said, "There is a bond deeper than family."

Jesus demonstrated same belief elsewhere when He said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Matt. 10:34-36)

With these words, Jesus is assuming that the bond of blood is strong! But, in the kingdom of Christ, there are friends that stick closer than brothers. There are instances where faithfulness to Christ and to His church will far exceed the faithfulness to family.

Indeed, this is what the church of Jesus Christ is all about. We are a band of brothers and sisters. Our intention is to do life together. By faith in Jesus Christ, we have become children of the King of kings. As 1 John 3:2 says, "We are children of God!" And thus, we have become united with Him into a new family. There ought to be a bond among us that stands the test of the severest difficulties.

God has called us to live and function together in the church. There are certain ways that we need to treat one another in the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, we are identified as a "body." Each of us have different roles, but our roles all work together for the "common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). To obtain this "common good," we are called to regard one another as more important than [ourselves] (Phil. 2:3). We are called "not merely [to] look out for our own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). We are called to "fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). As these things take place God is honored and the church will prosper.

Listen closely to the words of Jesus. John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." This is shown in us when there is genuine, corporate community among us, when there is genuine love demonstrated among us, when we regard others as more important than ourselves, when we look out for each other's interests, and not our own, when the each of us fulfill our God-given role in the body. Then, it will be obvious to the world that God is among us! The world will know that we are all followers of Christ! And the church will be glorious, as God will be exalted among us!

But, as we fail in these things, the church will fail.

If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Malachi. In our exposition of this book, we have come to the middle of chapter 2, where we find the people of Israel being "unfaithful" to their brothers and sisters around them. **The nation of Israel was failing in their faithfulness toward each other.** They were failing to keep their commitments to one another. They were acting treacherously toward one another. They were faithless toward one another. They were looking out for their own interests. They were failing to demonstrate love toward one another.

They were "breaking faith" with each other and "dealing treacherously with one another." Please consider our text:

Malachi 2:10-16

Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an 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. "As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts.

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

The title of my message this morning is, "Don't Forget His People." The people of Malachi's day had forgotten they were the people of God.

God had miraculously brought them back from captivity and brought them into the land once again, where they were to be a holy people and a light for the nations to behold. But, such was far from the case. Instead of remaining faithful to each other, they dealt treacherously against one another.

What makes this particularly horrifying is that they were blood and water. They were all Jews. They were all bound together by family but, they were also bound together by covenant. They were the chosen people that God had selected. God had promised, "I will be their God. They shall be my people." As is true of all of Malachi, we need to learn from their negative example. They had forgotten that they were the people of God. By their action they betrayed their own people. We too, need to make sure that we don't forget His people.

Here's my first point this morning:

1. Don't Break the Bond of Community (verse 10).

You see this in verse 10, which contains three questions. As is often the case in the Scriptures, these questions are coming with a purpose. They are intended to convict the people of Israel of their treacherous behavior toward one another. Here are the three questions: "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" (verse 10).

The first two questions form the basis for the third question. The first two question are getting at the unity of the people of God. "Do we not all have one father?" Now, some say that this refers to Abraham our father. We Jews all are descendants from one man, our father Abraham. Some say that this refers to God. In chapter 1, verse 6, God is identified as being a father (see also Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). It doesn't really matter which it exactly refers to, as the main point is that they are all of one family: the family of God.

To Israel, Malachi was saying, "We are a unique nation. God, Almighty, is our Father. He has created us to be His own possession." God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had promised to Abraham, "to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). His covenant with them was an everlasting covenant with them.

Time after time after time throughout the Scriptures, reference is made to this covenant.

When the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, cried out for help to the LORD because of their bondage, "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob took notice of them" (Ex. 2:24-25). When the people of Israel were disobedient in the wilderness by making a golden calf, the LORD was ready to destroy them all (Ex. 32:10). But, it was the promise that He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the turned His wrath away (Ex. 32:13). After Joshua led the people to conquer the promised land, the LORD said, "I brought out up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you'" (Judges 2:1). Throughout the times of great rebellion during the days of the judges, God remained faithful to His covenant to the Jewish people. To be

sure, they paid for their wickedness and rebellion. But, God never forsook the nation, even in their disobedience. He made a promise to them that He would keep. He would be faithful to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Even when Israel rejected God, by demanding a king to be appointed in His place, the LORD remained faithful to His people. To Samuel, the LORD said, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). A short time later, the LORD told Samuel to anoint Saul as king, "for I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me" (1 Sam. 9:16). When David brought the ark into the tent in Jerusalem, David reminded the people of the faithfulness of God to His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (1 Chron. 16:16-18), "He has remembered His covenant forever" (Psalm 105:8).

Throughout the Babylonian exile, the LORD remained faithful to His covenant. In his great prayer of confession, Nehemiah described God as "the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness" (Neh. 9:32). Nehemiah knew of God's faithfulness to His covenant with His people. He proclaimed it to all who had moved back to Jerusalem. The sheer fact that the LORD had brought back His people into Jerusalem was an evidence of the faithfulness of God. There wasn't a Jew in the land who didn't know this!

It's against that backdrop that Malachi writes, "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?"

The people of Malachi's day could easily have answered, "Of course, we have one father. Of course, He has created all of us! Of course, He has been faithful to us. Look around! His evidence is to be seen all over. See the wall that's build around the city? That's an evidence of our faithful God! See the temple. Oh, it may not quite reach the glory days of Solomon, but nevertheless, the fact that we have a temple in Jerusalem can only be attributed to the fact that our heavenly Father has been faithful to us as a people. See the people! There are scores of them! They are all around! That's God's work to bring us all back from the exile. We all have houses in the wall! We know a measure of safety now! Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Of course we do."

But then comes the stinging rebuke: "Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" In other words, "If God has been so faithful with us, why have we been so faithless with our brothers and sisters? He has brought us back into the land. He has give us a city. He has given us houses. He has given us a temple. He has reinstituted the sacrifices. If He has been so faithful to remain true to His promises, why have we failed in our promises to our fellow Israelites? Why have we been faithless? Why have we been reckless? Why have we not kept our word to one another?"

That's what this word means in verse 10. In the New American Standard and the King James Version, it is translated, "deal treacherously." It comes up in verse 11, "Judah has dealt treacherously." It comes up again in verse 14, "You have dealt treacherously." It comes up in verse 15, "Let no one deal treacherously." It's also at the end of verse 15, "Do not deal treacherously."

If you have another translation, your word choice may be a bit different. The ESV uses the word, "faithless." Verse 10, "Why then are we faithless to one another?" Verse 11, "Judah as been faithless." Verse 14, "You have been faithless." Verse 15, "Let none of you be faithless." Verse 16, "Do not be faithless." The NIV uses the word, "break faith." Verse 10, "Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" Verse 11, "Judah has broken faith." Verse 14, "You have broken faith." Verse 15, "Do not break faith." Verse 16, "Do not break faith."

From these verses, I think that you get an idea of what this word means. It means that the people of Israel were failing in their part of being among the covenant community. Verse 11, "Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" Their actions weren't consistant with their heavenly calling! Likewise, so also does the church need to be this way. As you fail in your relationships within the church, you fail in the community.

The application comes almost directly to the church. Oh, we may not all be blood relatives. We may not be able to trace our physical descent to Abraham, but the bond we have in Jesus Christ is deeper than blood.

It calls us to have a certain behavior among us. Our actions toward each other should be driven by the bond that our common faith has produced. In the words of verse 10, we shouldn't "deal treacherously" with each other. Instead, we should be faithful toward one another. We should serve one another. If we see another in need, we should help to meet their need. And when we see another hurting, we should feel their pain with them. And when it goes well with others, we should be encouraged, and rejoice with them and not be jealous of their good fortune. And as for the promises we make to each other, we should keep them.

God has formed us to be a body, that genuinely cares for each other. As you fail in your relationships within the church, you fail in the community. Don't break the bond of community. Keep it strong. Don't deal treacherously. Don't break faith with others in the body.

A great illustration of this comes in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In that day, those in the church were struggling with how to act when confronted with eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples. Though they had all knowledge that there is no such thing as an idol and no God, but the one true God (1 Cor. 8:1, 4), not all had had this knowledge. It may have brought people into a difficult circumstance. For instance, Paul envisioned the following scenario: "If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's" (1 Cor. 10:27-29).

The idea here is that you may well have freedom to eat the meat sacrificed to the idols. However, if your eating would do damage to the conscience of another believer, then, don't break faith the believer. Rather, change your actions and abstain from eating. This is an example of how it is that Christians ought to live faithful toward one another.

Let's turn to our second point, ...

2. Don't Make the Bond of Lawlessness (verses 11-12).

One of the ways in which Israel had failed to maintain the bond of community was in their marriage practices. "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an 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" (verse 11).

It's clear here that Malachi is referring to the practice of the Jews of marrying non-Jews. Israel had been warned over and over and over again that such a practice was not to happen. The reason was simple: these women would lead the Jews to tragedy. They would seduce their would-be husbands away from following the LORD, which would bring His wrath upon them. You never want to be the object of God's wrath.

Consider a few of the warnings given in the Bible.

Exodus 34:11-16

Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and **cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.**

Deuteronomy 7:3-4

Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For **they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods**; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.

Joshua 23:12-13

For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they **will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes**, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

And yet, despite these clear warnings, the people of Israel took foreign wives for themselves.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah (who were contemporaries of Malachi) allude to what was taking place. Here is Ezra's story:

Ezra 9:1-2, 10-12

Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, "The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever."

In the book of Nehemiah, we also read of what took place during the days of Malachi. Nehemiah wrote, "In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people" (Nehemiah 13:23-24). Now, catch the passion of Nehemiah in the next verse, "So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves" (Nehemiah 13:25).

Nehemiah was fuming angry with a righteous anger that the people were so easily forsaking the covenant of the LORD and marrying foreign women. He was cursing the Israelites. He was pulling out their hair. He was making them mouth the words of promise, never to give their children away to the foreign nations. The reality is that such a choice would lead the people of Israel after foreign gods. This is where Nehemiah goes in his logic.

Nehemiah continues, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. "Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?" Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me. Remember

them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites" (Neh. 13:26-29). Even one of the descendents of the high priests were guilty of this lawlessness. As a result, the priesthood was defiled.

And the LORD hated what was taking place. That's the thrust behind the word, "abomination" (in Malachi 2:11). God was really angry at what is taking place.

In Malachi 2:12 we see the LORD's curse come upon all who were guilty. "As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents and offering to the LORD of hosts." God wants to see these people removed from the covenant community. May they not come again and offer up a sacrifice unto the LORD.

It shows you how terrible the LORD considers this sin to be. If people are going to sin so blatantly, the LORD doesn't want them to feign their worship before Him. This is a recurring theme in Malachi. The LORD hates sin in the camp. Chapter 1, verse 10, "'Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,' says the LORD of hosts, 'nor will I accept an offering from you.'" Chapter 2, verse 3 speaks about how the LORD was ready to remove the sinful priest, so that he wouldn't be able to offer up any sacrifices upon the altar. And now, the LORD expresses His heart that the sinning member of the covenant community, who was mixing with foreign women, be "cut off from the tents of Jacob" because of His lawlessness.

The application of these things is quite straightforward and direct: "Don't Make the Bond of Lawlessness (verses 11-12)." Israel was not to marry outside the covenant community. We too, are not to join in covenant with those outside the people of God. Christians ought not to marry non-Christians. This is a point of application for Paul in 2 Corinthians 6.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, Come out from their midst and be separate" says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean. And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

I trust that as you pondered the above verses, you saw how Paul argues in these words exactly like Malachi does. God has promised to be our God. God is a father to us. We are in a covenant with Him and with others. Our behavior needs to be consistent. Light doesn't have fellowship with darkness. There is nothing in harmony with Christ and Belial. Or, in our particular case this morning, it makes no sense for a Christian to marry an unbeliever.

Now, for some of you, it's too late. You are married right now to a non-Christian. Or, you have become a Christian since you have been married. If this is you, be faithful in your marriage. If you are a woman, seek to win your husband without a word through your chaste and respectful behavior (1 Pet. 3:1-2). If you are a husband, display Christ's sacrificial love to her, and trust the Lord to open her eyes (Eph. 5:25). Be encouraged that your presence has a purifying effect upon your spouse. Paul said, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband" (1 Cor. 7:14). The purifying effect comes as you are bringing God into your marriage.

Now, for others of you, it's not too late. I'm thinking particularly of the children of our congregation. Oh, I wish that I could tell you the heartache that a marriage to an unbeliever causes in the life of the believing spouse. Life becomes more difficult. You aren't united in your view of life and death. You aren't united in your purposes. Your fellowship is hindered. Your giving is hindered. Sunday mornings can be lonely. It's more difficult to grow, when you are being hindered at home by a negative influence.

For your good, I long for each of you to marry within the faith. I would love nothing more this morning than for each of you who are here this morning and unmarried, to pledge before God that you would never marry an unbeliever. And I tell you this for your own happiness. The place to begin in choosing a marriage partner is to choose one who is a follower of Christ. It's the first step to marital happiness.

I would love for you to set your mind today to determine that you would do so. Parents, talk to your children about these things. If your heart is for your children to marry in the faith, it begins when they are four. Talk to them about a future marriage partner and how their genuine happiness will only be found if they marry in the Lord.

We see here in Malachi as well as in 2 Corinthians, that the LORD is not pleased when the people of God marry outside the covenant community. Let's transition now to my third point. We have seen, (1) Don't Break the Bond of Community (verse 10) and (2) Don't Make the Bond of Lawlessness (verses 11-12). And now, my third admonition, ...

3. Don't Break the Bond of Matrimony (verses 13-16).

In verse 13, we again see the LORD bringing up the matter of worship. He says, "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand."

Here were people bringing sacrifices, and being rejected by the LORD. They were trying to offer their sacrifices to the LORD, but the LORD was saying, "No. I will not accept it from you." They came back again, even more insistent than before. But the LORD was refusing their offering. Such things even moved them to tears, they were "weeping and groaning" and pleading that the LORD would accept their sacrifice, but the LORD remained unmoved: He would not accept the offering from their hands.

As is so often the case here in Malachi, the people responded with a question: "For what reason?" They were asking, "Why God? Why are you not accepting my offering? I'm giving you a gift, how can you refuse it from my hand? It doesn't make sense! Please take it." And though the altar was drenched with tears, the LORD still refused. In verse 14, we see the reason, "Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (verse 14).

In other words, "When you and your wife stood before the LORD and spoke forth your marital vows, I was there. I saw what took place. You promised your life-long fidelity toward your wife. You promised to have her and hold her. You promised to love her and keep her. You promised to do so in richer or in poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live. And yet, you have 'dealt treacherously' with her. Though she is your wife by covenant, you have broken your covenant with her. You have divorced her. You have failed to honor the covenant of your marriage."

Verse 15 continues to explain the situation in a bit more detail. Before I read it, you need to know that it's a difficult verse to translate. One commentator said that it is the most difficult verse in Malachi to translate. ^[1] Much of it has to do with the subject of the verse. Is the subject God? Or is the subject man? In the Hebrew text, it's not clear. This week, I was in my Hebrew text trying to figure it out, but it wasn't clear to me. Nevertheless, it would be good to see the options.

The New American Standard version takes man as the subject. "But not one has done [so] who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did [that] one [do] while he was seeking a godly offspring?" In this case, the idea is that there was a faithful remnant of people who didn't divorce their wives, but rather were seeking to raise up a godly generation.

Most other versions take God as the subject. For instance, here's the ESV, "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring." In this case, the idea is that God made the two one in marriage. One of the purposes of this union would be a godly generation.

Now, regardless of which view is right, the application is the same, all verses translate the last phrase of verse 15 in a similar fashion, "Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth." It's a simple admonition to pay attention to the covenants that you make! Don't break your marriage vows! Or, as I have put it, "Don't Break the Bond of Matrimony" (verses 13-16).

Verse 16 continues again on the theme. Again, there are some variance in the translations of the verse. The New American Standard reads with most of the rest, "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. (verse 16).

When two pieces of paper are glued together, you cannot separate them without ripping the pages a bit. The same is true in marriage. When two people become one, you cannot separate them without causing some incredible hurt between them. Leading up to the divorce, there is often times of incredible tension. Husbands and wives fight with each other. There are usually disputes in anger, each accusing the other of wrongdoing. There are disappointments.

If immorality is involved, the pain is magnified with feelings of inferiority and guilt and shame and sorrow. A divorce takes its toll financially, emotionally, and spiritually. All in all, it's a very painful experience.

Randy Alcorn tells of the time when he and a friend sat down together and posed this question to each other, "What would my adultery do?" They tried to list out some of the effects that they could think of should they ever fall to adultery. You could easily do the same with thinking about the devastating effects of a divorce in your family. Such a list would have the same effect. Anyway, here is Randy Alcorn's list.

"What would my adultery do?"

- Drag in the mud the reputation of my Lord.
- Make me have to look into His face one day and tell Him why I did it.
- Cause untold hurt to Nanci, my loyal wife and best friend.
- Forfeit Nanci's respect and trust.
- Permanently injure my credibility with my beloved daughters, Karina and Angie.
- Bring shame upon my family.
- Inflict hurt on my church and friends, especially those I've led to Christ and discipled.
- Bring an irretrievable loss of years of witnessing to relatives and friends.
- Bring pleasure to Satan, God's enemy.
- Possibly give me a sexually transmitted disease, posing a risk to Nanci.
- Lose my self-respect, discredit my name, and invoke lifelong embarrassment upon myself.

Alcorn then wrote the following observation, "If we would rehearse in advance the devastating consequences of immorality, we would be far less prone to commit it." ^[2]

As I look out among all of you, I am looking upon a handful of you who have been divorced. I believe that each and every one of you could come up here, stand behind this pulpit and give a testimony as to the awfulness of divorce and the misery that it has caused you. And so, I hardly need to convince you this morning, that "God hates divorce." To be sure, the LORD allows for it in certain circumstances. In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, Jesus gave the opportunity for divorce in the case of adultery. Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of people. But, from the beginning of creation, God designed one man with one woman forming a strong union, designed to last for life (Matt. 19:5-6).

I would contend that reconciliation is always to be preferred over divorce. As a pastor, this is always how I will counsel. I will counsel

reconciliation until it is absolutely clear for all to see that reconciliation is impossible. I'll do so, because I know of the devastation that it causes in the lives of people. It is far better to see reconciliation in a marriage than it is to experience divorce.

You may be feeling some tremendous guilt over your failures, especially as I have been preaching this morning and bringing to remembrance the sins of the past. Perhaps even the words of this prophet have sunk deep into your soul. I have an unbelieving spouse! Does God want to cut me off from His people? (vs 12). I have a divorce in my past! Will God not accept my worship? (verses 13-14). I have a past filled with sexual immorality. Does God really accept me?

It may just be the cause that your unfaithfulness in your marriage gives God every reason to cast you off! Be thankful that you are living today, after the cross. Here is the glory of the cross! "I've messed up. My sins are huge. I deserve to be cast off. But, in Christ Jesus, there is full restoration for my sins!"

Consider the following words very carefully. Paul writes, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost!" (1 Tim. 1:17). Christ Jesus came and dwelt among us with a purpose to save those who recognize themselves to be sinners. Those who have been divorced are in a position to clearly understand their sin before God. It may just be that you are discouraged in your sin. It may just be that you feel as if your sin is so bad that it can never be forgiven. Take comfort in Paul's words. He said that He was the foremost of sinners! If you think that your sin is bad, consider Paul's sin. His is every bit as great as your sin is. And Paul found forgiveness in the cross, and was greatly used by God. You too can experience these same things!

The thing about divorces is that it affects far more people than merely the husband and wife.

Children are affected by the divorce of their parents. They hop between homes, with mom and dad competing for their approval. For the rest of their lives, they are reminded that mom and dad just couldn't get along. Extended family are affected by divorce. Family gatherings become complicated. Whose invited? Whose not? Family relationships are strained. Is he considered to be in the family? Or is he out of the family?

But, it also affects the church. This is the point of our text this morning: your actions affect the people of God! When others are looking to you as a model of godliness, and your marriage crumbles, it's disheartening to the people of God. As a body, we "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). We feel the flesh ripping from our skin when others are going through a divorce. It's terrible. So, "take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" (as verse 16 ends).

So, "Don't Forget the People of God." So, "Don't break the bond of matrimony (verses 13-16)."

But, I want to push my application a bit further than this. There are many of you here this morning, for whom divorce is simply not an option. You have it ingrained within you of how bad it is. Malachi 2:16, "God hates divorce," resonates within your head. And so, divorce for you simply isn't an option. You would never "break the bond of matrimony."

And yet, there are some of you, who are experiencing marital difficulties. Perhaps you have experienced years of marital difficulties. Oh, you would never "break the bond of matrimony," but, you are *bending* it right now. You know that your marriage isn't what it ought to be. You know that your marriage has fallen short of what the LORD would desire. But, sadly, you have become content in the state of your marriage.

"Oh, it's not everything that it ought to be," you say, "but, at least we aren't divorced." This isn't a marriage that God wants.

The LORD has designed marriage for our happiness and for our joy! The LORD delights in happy marriages, because they reflect the relation of Christ to His church. Perhaps there are some of you who need to take this last admonition, "Don't Break the Bond of Matrimony," and you need to take the opposite advice, "Build the Bond of Matrimony."

Do what you can do to build up your marriage. Express your love toward your spouse every day. Sacrificially serve your spouse every day. Give up your own time, and invest it in your spouse. Be creative to think of ways to spend time together. Talk with each other. Pray with each other. Read the Scripture together. Have fun together. Or, purchase some sort of marriage book and learn some practical ways in which you can put into practice the commands to love your wives as Christ loved the church, (Eph. 5:25) and be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22).

May the LORD see fit to raise up strong families at Rock Valley Bible Church, who would model what godly marriages are all about.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 29, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Craig Blaising, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 1581.

[2] Randy Alcorn, The Purity Principle, p. 89.