
LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

TEXT: Malachi 2:10–3:5

MAIN IDEA: True worship of God includes faithfulness in our relationships.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- We are **collecting new or lightly used coats, blankets, hats, gloves, and socks** for our neighbors in the Greater Paterson area. You can bring these to the lobby of either campus between October 30 and November 16.
- 'Tis the season ... to get on up to Ringwood for the **Christmas Kickoff, on Saturday, December 6, 9–11:30 am**. We're going to deck the halls, and have food, and do kids stuff, and do outreach. What's not to like?? RSVP on the Digital Bulletin!
- Our **Student Ministry's Winter Retreat** is happening **February 20–22**. We'll be rocking out at High Point Bible Camp in Pennsylvania. This is a great way for our teens to connect with each other, their leaders, and the Lord. Sign up on the Digital Bulletin.

GETTING STARTED:

- Watch this week's Community Extras Video.
 - **Optional Icebreaker:** What's the best and worst cereal?
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Covenant Faithfulness

Read Malachi 2:10.



Throughout this passage, “faithlessness” is disloyalty to others with whom there should be a relationship of love. God made a covenant with Israel’s forefathers that placed them in this kind of relationship with him and with one another. Why is there such a strong link between our love for God and our love for other people?

Read Malachi 2:11–12.

Leaders: There is a translational issue in verse 12, which the ESV translates “May the LORD cut off ... any descendant of the man who does this.” As is noted in the ESV footnote, the Hebrew literally says, “Any who wakes and answers.” This is a challenging phrase, and translations differ on how to handle it. The best solution is to translate the phrase, “May the LORD cut off ... any man who does this, whoever he may be.” In other words, if you’re awake and able to answer someone who talks to you, you are responsible and accountable to God.



Both pastors, Doug (in Totowa) and Ryan (in Ringwood), emphasized that the problem with Israel marrying foreign women was not racism. What was the problem with intermarriage, and why was it seen as a violation of the covenant?

Leaders: The issue with intermarriage was that foreign spouses would bring with them the worship of other gods. You can see this in the wording of the text: Judah has married “the daughter of a foreign god.” The key biblical passages that give this rationale are Exodus 24:11–16, Deuteronomy 7:1–4, Joshua 23:11–13, Judges 3:5–6, and 1 Kings 11:1–8. We see that this was an issue in the postexilic period in Ezra 9:1–2 and Nehemiah 13:23–27. Remember the important counterexamples of foreign women who became worshipers of God and were married into Israel. The most obvious of these are Rahab and Ruth, though many other, more obscure characters from the Old Testament could be cited.



Why is it unwise today for a Christian to marry a non-Christian?

Leaders: The “unequally yoked” passage is 2 Corinthians 6:14–16.



How would you counsel a Christian friend who is married to a non-Christian?

Leaders: In 1 Corinthians 7:12–16, Paul says that a Christian should not divorce an unbelieving spouse, unless the unbeliever separates. He also speaks here of the holy influence the Christian has on the home. First Peter 3:1–2 holds out the hope that the unbelieving husband would be “won without a word” by seeing the conduct of his Christian wife.

Faithfulness in Marriage

Read Malachi 2:13–16.

Leaders: There is also a translation issue in verse 16. Some English versions, such as the NIV, the NET, or the NLT, say, “I hate divorce, ‘says the LORD.’” Because the Hebrew of this verse is difficult, these translations adopt the strategy of supposing that a word has dropped out of the manuscripts or has been changed (this is called a textual emendation), even though no known Hebrew manuscript supports this. There are other approaches, such as that taken by the KJV, but the issues are too complicated to explain in a Community Group discussion guide. Suffice it to say, we agree with the ESV’s translation of this verse.



In verse 13, the people weep at God’s altar because he will not accept their offerings with favor. How would we today discern that God is displeased with us?



According to verse 14, what is the role of the husband and the wife in the covenant of marriage, and what is God’s role?

Leaders: Other examples of witnesses in covenant ceremonies in the Old Testament include a heap of stones (Gen 31:44–49), the song of Moses (Deut 31:19, 21), heaven and earth (Deut 31:28), the book of the Law of God placed in the holy of holies beside the ark (Deut 31:26), the people of Israel themselves (Josh 24:22), and a large stone set up by Joshua under the terebinth of Shechem (Josh 24:26–27).

💡 What are some ways that someone can be faithless to their spouse in marriage?

💡 Why does the imagery of verse 16 portray divorce as an act of violence?

Leaders: Please be careful with this part of the conversation, keeping in mind that there may be people in your group who have undergone the often traumatic experience of divorce. It may be helpful in your conversation to note that the Bible gives several legitimate reasons for divorce: Adultery (Matt 19:9), abandonment by an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:15), and other similar instances of covenant unfaithfulness (1 Cor 7:15; that is, instances of magnitude comparable to abandonment).

💡 The antidote to marital faithlessness, said twice in this passage, is to guard your spirit. How do we do this?

The God of Justice

Read Malachi 2:17.

💡 What is the problem with the people's attitude portrayed in this verse?

Leaders: Concern over the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous is also found in passages like Psalm 73:1–15 and Habakkuk 1:12–17.

💡 What is the proper response of faith to this problem?

The Lord Whom You Seek

Read Malachi 3:1–5.

💡 What gospel truths do you see taught in these verses?

💡 Verse 3 speaks of the purifying of the sons of Levi, and of Judah and Jerusalem making offerings in the temple. How does this tie in with what we learned of the priesthood of all believers last week?

PRAYER TIME

Praise God for rescuing us from our faithlessness.

Pray that God would enable you to be faithful in the many relationships he has given you.

Pray for some married couples you know.