



“Priestly Failure” (Malachi 2)

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Intro: Malachi’s prophetic ministry was to a people who were religious and yet full of selfishness and greed. They would vow to give God their best, then afterward offer blemished sacrifices to the Lord. This was an indictment on the true condition of their hearts (Matthew 6:21). They viewed their worship experience as an obligation and a wearisome duty. And they were not only willingly ignorant about their sin, but were arrogant as well.

THE TEXT:

vv.1-2 The beginnings of the Levitical priesthood (see Ex.32:1-8, 15-29; Numbers 1:47-53); The Levites were responsible for the “tabernacle of the Testimony.” What an awesome privilege! What a holy responsibility! What failures! See I Peter 2:5, 9; Rev.1:4-6. A large segment of the church is failing in its priestly call and duty, and the result in our day is similar to what was happening in Malachi’s day.

v.3 This has to be the most gross embarrassment one could imagine. This dung was to be carried outside the camp and burned...

vv.4-6 This is our calling: To revere and stand in awe of the Lord, to speak the truth of the Word of God, to shun hypocrisy, to walk with the lord in peace and uprightness, and to turn people from sin. I thought of King David’s words in Psalm 51:1-13.

vv.7-9 These priests were not teaching the truth. They were also showing partiality in matters of the law. This partiality was for personal gain. For example, allowing the people to bring blemished sacrifices benefited them, because they received a portion of the sacrifice. See Micah 3:11. As a result of their actions they were leading people astray. Everyone is personally responsible for their own sin, but God will hold accountable those who lead people into sin.

vv.10-12 This is an indictment against the people for marrying outside of the will of God, specifically marrying people who did not worship and serve the God of Israel. Note that some who did this still brought offerings to the Lord Almighty. In other words, they kept up a religious routine but were not repentant regarding their sin.

v.13 There was a lot of emotion among the people regarding their situation, and they often cried during worship services, but they were willingly blind to the reason why the blessing of God was not upon their lives. And their tears were not tears of repentance.

v.14 One of the reasons God's blessing was not upon them was because of their failure to keep their marriage covenant. In other words, divorce was commonplace among them.

v.15a This refers to the mystery of two becoming one flesh in marriage.

v.15b A Christian couple will have a godly influence on their children. Even children who have one believing and one unbelieving parent are better off if the couple is willing to stay together (see I Cor.7:12-14).

v.16 Please note that God does not say that he hates people who divorce, or are divorced. He hates divorce, because of the violation of a sacred institution, the breaking of a sacred covenant, and the terrible damage it produces. In modern Western society, a man puts an engagement ring on a woman's finger to propose marriage. But in ancient Israel, a man would place the corner of his garment over her (Ezek.16:8; Ruth 3:9). So if a man divorced his wife, he wrenched apart that which God had said he had made "one flesh."

ISSUES IN THE TEXT:

PRIESTLY FAILURE THAT LED OTHERS TO SIN

- Matthew 18:6-7...if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!
- I Kings 14:6; 15:26, 30, 34; 16:2, 13, 19, 26; 21:22; 22:52; II Kings 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21; 21:16; 23:15.
- I Kings 21:25 There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, *urged on by Jezebel* his wife.
- Rev.2:14.

MARRIAGE OUT OF THE WILL OF GOD

- This is what led Solomon astray (I Kings 11:1-6); See also Ex.34:15-15; Deut.7:3-4; Joshua 23:12-13; Judges 3:6-7; Ezra 9-10; Neh.13:23-29.
- How do I know the person I am planning to marry is a Christian?
 1. When did they become a Christian? Do they have a testimony?
 2. Do they openly confess Jesus Christ?
 3. Do they pray?
 4. Do they read and meditate on the Word of God?
 5. Are they actively involved in a Bible teaching church?
- II Cor.6:14-15 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What

harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

DIVORCE OUT OF THE WILL OF GOD

See Deut. 24:1-4; Word for “indecent” is more often translated “nakedness,” and means shameful improper behavior. Two schools of thought emerged as to what “improper behavior” would allow someone to get a divorce. These two schools of thought were led by two rabbis: Rabbi Hillel & Rabbi Shammai. In the record of the Talmud (the collection of ancient Jewish writings that forms the basis of Jewish religious law) alone, there are 316 issues on which they debated. The matters they debated included: **Admission to Torah study**. The House of Shammai believed only worthy students should be admitted to study Torah. The House of Hillel believed that Torah may be taught to anyone, in the expectation that they will repent and become worthy. **White lies**. Whether one should tell an ugly bride that she is beautiful. Shammai said it was wrong to lie, and Hillel said that all brides are beautiful on their wedding day. **Hanukkah**. The House of Shammai held that on the first night eight lights should be lit, and then they should decrease on each successive night, ending with one on the last night; while the House of Hillel held that one should start with one light and increase the number on each night, ending with eight. **Divorce**. The House of Shammai held that a man may only divorce his wife for a serious transgression, but the House of Hillel allowed divorce for even trivial offenses, such as burning a meal. In general, the House of Shammai's positions were stricter than those of the House of Hillel.

Jesus set some things straight for us in Matthew 19:3-10; Gen.2:23-24.

Biblical allowances for divorce:

1. Adultery (Matthew 19:9)

- Note: Even though allowed, it is not commanded.

2. An unbeliever who leaves (I Cor.7:15)

- The implication is that one spouse became a Christian after the marriage (I Cor.7:20).

- The counsel for the now unmarried believer is to remain unmarried if at all possible (I Cor.7:27-28, 32-35). If they do remarry, it must be to a believer (I Cor.7:39b).

3. Shameful improper behavior (Deut.24)

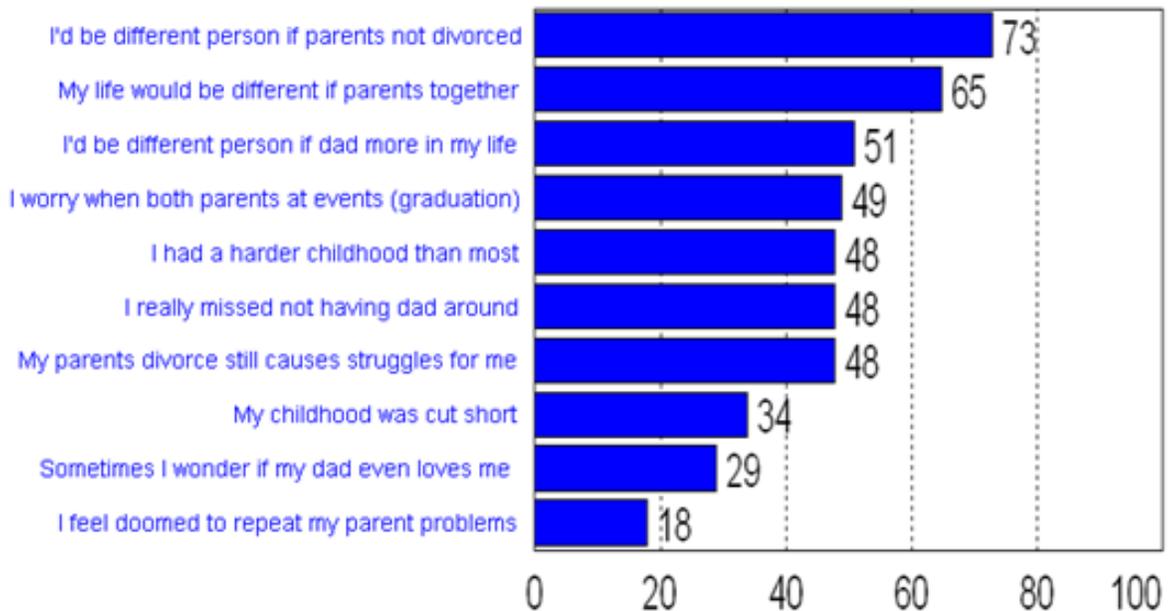
- Abuse? Separation & seek the counsel of church leadership.

- Vows made at a flower lined altar are only as good as those made at the altars of everyday life. See Eph.5:25.
- The impact divorce has on children: If the children are young, they sometimes blame themselves for their parents divorce. At the very least, divorce is stressful

for children. Parent-child relationships may become strained, the divorce may create economic

hardships. Children may become angry, disobedient, rebellious, depressed. The divorce may affect a child's academic achievement.

- One study of college students, whose parents had divorced at least 3 years previously, reported on the percentage who still had painful feelings. These were resilient, well functioning college students.



Source: Laumann-Billings, L. & Emery, R.E. (2000). Distress among young adults from divorced families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 671-687.

CONCLUSION

- I Tim.5:12; Titus 2:1-8.
- We desperately need more priestly examples in the church of Jesus Christ. Will you be one? Reverence and stand in awe of the Lord, speak the truth of the Word of God, shun hypocrisy, and walk with the Lord in peace and uprightness.
- If you are hoping to marry one day, make sure you marry someone who knows and loves the Lord. If you are divorced, stay unmarried unless you have clear biblical guidelines to remarry.