

SERIES: Extreme Makeover: Remodeling Your House into a Home

SERMON: **Why God Hates Divorce**

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 2:10-16

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My sermon title today, “Why God Hates Divorce,” calls for some careful preliminary analysis. In fact, there are four things I want to point out by way of introduction. First, the title presupposes that God does indeed hate divorce. I feel confident in making that assertion because God Himself says so. Mal. 2:16 reads, “‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel . . . . So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.”

But second, I hasten to point out what the title does *not* say, namely, “Why God Hates Divorced People.” There is no such assertion in the Bible, and there are, in fact, many places where the Bible flatly contradicts such a notion. True, there are some who might be called “perpetrators of divorce,” and God may indeed hate them. By that I am speaking of those who consciously and intentionally use the divorce laws to free themselves of unwanted responsibility or to enable them to get into a new relationship that seems more exciting. But I am convinced that most divorced people are victims, not perpetrators of divorce, and God loves them.

In fact, in many cases both spouses in the same divorce are victims—victims of Satan’s lies, particularly the myth of the greener grass, victims of ignorance concerning God’s principles, victims of a lack of resources to deal with the problems in their marriages. They don’t want a divorce; they hate the thought of being divorced, but they just don’t know any way out of the trap in which they find themselves.

Now when I call these people “victims” I am not trying to relieve them of all responsibility for their situation. Nearly all of those who have suffered divorce have made some bad decisions somewhere along the way which led them into court. But I do believe that in most cases this was not a willful act of rebellion toward God; instead divorce becomes the last resort to relieve the pain of a broken relationship. What they don’t realize, however, is that the anticipated cure, namely divorce, is often more painful than the disease, the broken marriage. In fact, so convinced am I of the pain and trauma that divorce produces that I have taken out of my vocabulary the term “divorcee.” I always try to speak instead of “the one who has suffered divorce.”

A third preliminary issue is that while God hates divorce, it is not by any means the only thing He hates. Prov. 6:16 reads, “These are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”<sup>1</sup> My point is not to minimize the hatred God has of divorce, but to help us realize that divorce is not a unique sin that makes a person unredeemable in the sight of God or unusable in the church.

Fourth, it is important to note that while God hates divorce, He does not forbid all divorce. In fact, under certain very restricted conditions God expressly permits it. I must assume that in those situations God hates what causes the divorce (namely unrepentant sexual sin) more than He hates divorce itself. This morning I do not have time to talk about the exceptions to God’s principle of “no divorce,” but I have written a rather lengthy paper on the subject, which has

been widely used in our denomination and which I would be happy to share with anyone who would like to study the issue. In fact, I have a few copies with me here this morning.

Friends, the church needs a major awakening to the tragedy that easy divorce is perpetrating upon families, upon children, and upon society. Even the secular world is beginning to wake up to the seriousness of the problem of divorce.<sup>ii</sup> A Michigan state legislator recently attempted to reform that state's no-fault divorce law, which allows divorce for any reason, even if only one party wants it. The law is so lenient, Rep. Jessie Dalman said, "it is easier to divorce my wife of 26 years than to fire someone I hired one week ago."<sup>iii</sup>

But making it harder to get a divorce, while a step in the right direction, is not the only way to tackle the problem. Clarence Page, a syndicated columnist for the Chicago Tribune, wrote an editorial entitled, "*Easy Marriage, Easy Divorce.*" After discussing the pros and cons of no-fault divorce, he wrote,

*Fault or no-fault, divorce is no fun. But the solution is not to be found at the back end of the problem, which is bad marriages. Let's look at the other end. Instead of making it harder to get divorced, I think we ought to make it harder to get married. Worse than the no-fault divorce is the no-sweat wedding. If easy divorce cheapens the institution of marriage, so does easy marriage. We have waiting periods for gun purchases, mandatory training for drivers' licenses, but nothing at all for two people who want to do the most important thing human beings can do, which is to create other human beings and raise a family.*

I am pleased that in certain communities in Arizona and Arkansas, Catholic and Protestant clergy have covenanted together not to officiate at weddings where the couple has failed to go through extensive premarital counseling! In many other places, however, wedding chapels are ready and waiting to marry anyone for a fee, even if they met on the Internet the week before.

But enough about the culture we live in! What is most important to me is what God, our Creator, has to say on the subject of divorce. And maybe if we understood better *why* God hates divorce, we would fight harder for our families. So this morning I want to offer you four reasons *Why* God hates divorce.

### **God hates divorce because divorce violates His perfect plan for His highest creation.**

We defined marriage last week "as one man and one woman united in a lifelong relationship of commitment, companionship, fellowship, service, and love." Divorce was never part of God's original blueprint for the home. Not only is that implied in the Genesis account, it is clearly stated by Jesus. He said in Matthew 19:8: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was *not this way* from the beginning." It is also made clear in our primary text for today—Malachi 2:10-16. Will you turn there with me?

*Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?*

*Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in*

*Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob --even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.*

*Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.*

*Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*

*"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.*

*So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.*

In this text the prophet takes the people of Israel to task for their spiritual unfaithfulness and for their unfaithfulness to their marriage vows. Spiritual and physical adultery are often linked in the Bible; indeed they almost always go together. A man in our church who was in the process of divorcing his wife without biblical grounds, told me, "I've never been closer to Christ." Frankly, I didn't believe it, and there was nothing in his actions or attitudes that would suggest fellowship with God. Yes, there were tears, but the tears reminded me of the tears here in verse 13: "You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands." Friends, this may be the most devastating of all the results of divorce—the loss of intimacy and fellowship with God that accompanies disobedience, having Him turn a deaf ear in our direction.

In Malachi 2:15 the prophet goes back to the beginning of creation and the institution of marriage. "Has not the Lord made them one?" i.e. one flesh? God had enough creative energy to make many wives for Adam. Why then did He create only one? Malachi asks that very question in verse 15. And here is the answer: Monogamy was His intended design, in order to raise up a godly offspring. The author's point is that divorce clearly counteracts the original purposes of God to establish families here on earth. "So," says Malachi, "guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith."

God's plan is, by definition, the best plan. How could it be otherwise? If He is the infinite, eternal, omniscient God of wisdom, power, and love that the Scriptures describe, would He devise a plan that would not be good for His children? Would He demand lifelong commitment in marriage if that commitment interfered with our welfare and our happiness?

Jesus answered that question emphatically in the Sermon on the Mount. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will

your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:9-11). And marriage is one of the greatest gifts God has given to His creation.

But, you say, there’s nothing godly about *my* marriage. It’s miserable, it’s unhappy, it’s degrading. Do you mean to tell me that God wants me to stay in this for the rest of my life? Of course not! God doesn’t want you to stay in a miserable, unhappy, degrading marriage for even five more minutes! But there is an alternative to ending a lousy marriage—and that’s to seek healing for it. I know there are a number of couples here this morning who have seen their marriages healed. I’m talking about marriages that were once in very serious trouble but today are solid, happy, and fulfilling—not perfect, but redeemed!

In fact, in a moment I’m going to ask some of you to stand, if (1) your marriage was once so troubled that you seriously thought about divorce, but (2) God has healed your marriage to the point that divorce is out of the question. If that describes you, would you be so bold as to stand right now as a testimony to God’s grace?

Friends, does God still heal today? We have some miracles standing before our eyes here this morning—miracles of God’s healing power. Thank you; now please be seated. By the way, I’m sure many of these families would be happy to share with you *how* God healed their marriage. There is hope.

### **God hates divorce because divorce involves the breaking of a covenant.**

The concept of a solemn covenant is at the heart of Malachi 2. There was a spiritual covenant between God and His people, and that covenant served as the symbol for the marriage covenant. All marriages, whether civil or religious, include the recitation of some kind of vows—promises of mutual commitment before God and man. When a man and a woman marry, they do not say, “Till divorce do us part,” they say, “Till death do us part.”

Do you know how serious covenant-breaking is to God? Listen to a few of the literally dozens of passages that speak about God’s attitude toward those who break covenants and vows. First, Lev. 26:14ff:

*But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.*

Or consider Ecclesiastes 5:4-6:

*“When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ (Wow! I’ve heard that a bunch of time in marriage counseling!) Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?”*

In order to illustrate all the more graphically the heinousness of divorce, Malachi uses three phrases in chapter 2, verse 14 to describe the victim of divorce: “Wife of your youth,” “your partner,” and “the wife of your marriage covenant.” One commentator writes to men, who in Malachi’s day were the *only ones* who had the right to divorce,

*She whom you thus wronged was the companion of those earlier and brighter days, when in the bloom of her young beauty she left her father’s house and shared your early struggles, and rejoiced in your later success; who walked arm in arm with you along the pilgrimage of life, cheering you in its trials by her gentle ministry; and now, when the bloom of her youth has faded and the friends of her youth have gone, when father and mother whom she left for you are in the grave, then you cruelly cast her off as a worn-out, worthless thing, and insult her holiest affections by putting an idolater and a heathen in her place.<sup>iv</sup>*

Of course, this cuts both ways, for today there are almost as many women violating their marriage covenants as men.

**God hates divorce because He loves people and doesn’t want them to suffer the pain that divorce inevitably produces.**

Divorce, friends, is ugly. Even under the best of circumstances it causes great pain. When a husband and wife get married, they become one flesh. That’s the essence of marriage. When a husband and wife get divorced, that one flesh is torn apart. There’s no painless way to tear one’s flesh apart. God knows that, and that’s why He hates divorce.

Researchers at the University of Chicago and the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., categorized life’s most stressful events and found that divorce ranked third behind the death of a child and the death of a spouse.<sup>v</sup> Some people I know who have experienced all three would rank divorce even higher. What I do not understand is why so many will endure all the emotional pain, psychological pain, financial pain, family pain, loneliness, bitterness, and other kinds of suffering that divorce produces, but they won’t seek marriage counseling, or if they do, they won’t engage in the hard but rewarding work that can bring healing to a troubled marriage.

God loves people, and I think He has a special love for those who have been divorced against their will, as well as for their children. Listen to Psalm 68:4,5:

*Sing to God, sing praise to his name,  
extol him who rides on the clouds--  
his name is the Lord--*

*and rejoice before him.*  
*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,*  
*is God in his holy dwelling.*  
*God sets the lonely in families.* (and one of those special families is the  
 church).

Now tell me, do you think God is offering here to be a father to those made widows and orphans by death but not those made widows and orphans by divorce?

**God hates divorce because He loves children, and children are devastated by divorce.**

Children are the silent victims of divorce. *Always.* One mother I know who divorced her husband to marry another man tried to convince me that her children were doing well; in fact, she had convinced herself that her children were better off with their time and love divided between two homes than they would have been had she stayed in a loveless marriage. Leaving aside the fact I have already mentioned—namely loveless marriages don't have to remain that way—this woman was simply rationalizing her decision. I knew her children, and her children were hurting, and I believe they were hurting more because of the divorce than they ever would have had she not left their father.

Now I'm not going to stand here and tell you that there's never a situation in which the children are better off apart from one of the parents, because we all know of abusive situations where, for their own safety, children need to be removed. But in the great majority of cases, children are hurt more by divorce than they are by a difficult marriage. And they hurt at every stage of life.

Children of divorce hurt when they are small. I had a little preschooler in St. Louis come to me and tell me she thought she was going to die. The trauma she was experiencing was directly related to the fact that her daddy had moved away and she didn't know if he was coming back. Every S.S. teacher and every public school teacher will tell you about the pain inflicted in the lives of small children when mommy and daddy go separate ways. In many classrooms today the number of children who live with both their natural parents in the same house is a distinct minority. And we are surprised at the behavior problems we see?

Children of divorce hurt as adolescents. *Newsweek* magazine reported that teenagers from broken homes are far more likely to drop out of school, have children out of wedlock, and have poor mental health.<sup>vi</sup> A social worker in our church in St. Louis who specialized in counseling the adolescent victims of divorce in the public schools shared with me the seething anger that many of the teens have toward family, God, and life in general, to say nothing of the trauma when the divorced parents remarry and introduce an "alien" to their exclusive club.

Children of divorce hurt even as adults. My wife's parents divorced when she was 8. As divorces go it was one of the better ones. Her parents remained civil and there was no attempt on the part

of one of them to paint the other as the bad guy. They both lived here in Wichita, so she and her brothers had plenty of access to both parents. Her mother and her stepmother became friends and to this day they remain friends, even though her dad died in 1994. We can all have Thanksgiving Dinner together and there is no tension or difficulty. Furthermore, Jan came to faith in Christ through her stepmother, so the best thing that ever happened to her was an indirect result of her parents' divorce. That's why I say that as divorces go, this was one of the better ones.

But does that mean that the divorce of her parents left no scars? Don't believe it for a moment. Some of the toughest things we have had to deal with in our 40 years of marriage were the result of that decision by her parents long before I met her. She has done an amazing job coming to grips with those issues (to say nothing of the problems *I* brought into the marriage), but the question I would ask is this: "Does a child deserve to pay that price so the parents can find a quick escape route from the pressures of life?" And remember, this was by no means a typical divorce. The scars left when mom and dad are bitter and angry or when one of them just abandons the family, or when one moves far away, are infinitely more severe.

Now I wish to conclude with one more point:

***Because God hates divorce, we should hate divorce and reject it as a solution to the trials we face in marriage.***

I'm *not* talking here about the person whose spouse is guilty of persistent, unrepentant adultery. Jesus addressed that situation in Matthew 5:31,32 with some special instruction. Nor am I talking about the person who because of his or her commitment to Christ has been abandoned by an unbelieving spouse. Paul addresses that situation in I Cor. 7 with some special instruction. But I *am* talking to nearly everyone else. If God hates divorce, we should hate it. If God says "no," we should say "no." If God says, "With me all things are possible, and I can heal your marriage if you are willing to live by my principles, invest the necessary effort, and trust me," then *we* should say, "Yes, Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."

I want to read a letter I received from a young couple in St. Louis a number of years ago after preaching on the subject of divorce.

*Mike,*

*I wanted to drop you a note and let you know that I . . . appreciate your comments on the subject of divorce and how much God hates it!*

*Having been through a divorce I see the destruction that it does—not only to the two married individuals, but the children, the in-laws, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, friends, associates—it seems to be a never ending "ripple" effect that touches so many people. It is a devastating move that cripples the family emotionally, spiritually, financially, educationally, etc. I have seen the effects on my 3 ½ year old son; it is so sad to see him grieve for our past mistakes.*

*My wife and I are moving in the direction of reconciliation. We both feel very*

*comfortable with each other and have worked through a lot of garbage and hope to put our family back together the way God intended it. Our counseling has gone very well and we really enjoy each other. There have been some arguments, etc., but we have actually been able to work through the situations very well. It has been work but it has been fun—we are making it fun!! I look forward to getting our family whole and healed!*

*Please continue to preach God's Word as you have. I wish sometimes that I could stand on a mountain and shout a warning for people not to go down the road that we did. Thank God for giving us the opportunity to "make it right"—most don't get that chance. Mike, please continue to warn the families at E. Free that God hates divorce and it is not the "way out" that most people think it is.*

*I know there are cases that people are in danger and they need to be removed from a situation, but our society has made divorce look like a cure-all for marriage problems—it's not! It just causes much more pain and destroyed lives.*

*God bless, Brian Bauer*

Several months after I received that letter, I had the privilege of conducting a re-marriage ceremony for Brian and Kathleen. They have been growing since and are serving God faithfully as volunteers in our church in St. Louis. Brian just graduated from Covenant Seminary in May and is looking for a permanent ministry in God's church.

**Conclusion:** Marriage is like a garden, friends. Neglect it long enough and it will become a jungle. If your "garden" is looking a little shabby, now is the time to pull some weeds. If the task seems beyond you, seek a professional gardener. There is much at stake. If you see friends of yours that are in trouble, encourage them to get help and get it now.

Reconciliation in marriage is possible. I've seen it happen. It is possible because our God is a reconciling God. In 2 Cor. 5:17-18 we read, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

God sent His one and only Son to the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin. When we put our faith and trust in Jesus' sacrifice, God extends to us the free gift of reconciliation—He becomes our friend. But He does more than that—He gives to us the ministry of reconciliation, the privilege of bringing others to the Cross, but also the privilege of breaking down the walls that separate us and finding healing for all our relationships.

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i. And there are more:

God hates idols and images (Deut. 16:21,22),

He hates all who do wrong (Ps. 5:5),

He hates the wicked and those who love violence (Ps. 11:5),

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He hates robbery and iniquity (Isa. 61:8),  
He hates the burning of incense in the worship of other gods (Jer. 44:4),  
He hates religious feasts and burnt offerings when the hearts of His people are not right  
(Amos 5:21),  
and He hates the plotting of evil against a neighbor (Zech. 8:17).

ii. Larry Bumpass, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin, projects that 60 percent of all marriages today will eventually end in divorce.

iii. Dalman has proposed that if one partner wants to reconcile, then the one who wants a divorce will have to prove fault. Second, the law would give more power over the division of assets to the partner who wants to reconcile. And third, if there are children, the parents would have to prove that the divorce is in their best interests.

iv. T. V. Moore, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: A New Translation with Notes*, 362-63.

v. *Industry Week*, June 23, 1980, 81.

vi. *Newsweek*, February 19, 1996.