

Old New Questions (6): What Does God Think About Divorce

(Malachi 2:10-16)

I. Introduction

- A. Tony Toto of Allentown, PA., survived attempts on his life by his wife Frances
 - 1. She hired thugs to beat him up with a baseball bats, but he survived
 - a. Then she strung wire across their basement steps, but he survived that
 - b. Then she just shot him, and Tony miraculously survived that attack too.
 - 2. More miraculously, he forgave Frances and visited her each week in prison.
 - a. When she was paroled; Tony took her back and they resumed marriage
 - b. Tony, *"I don't understand why people break up over silly little things"*
 - 3. Did they live happily ever after? No one has heard from Tony in a while!
- B. In 1999, Barna Research Group released a study on divorce and religious faith
 - 1. The reported a national divorce rate of 24% (*several ways to figure that*)
 - a. **Barna:** Put 100 adults (18+) in a room, 24 will be divorced at least once.
 - b. That does sound a bit better than the oft quoted 50% divorce rate
 - c. Multiple divorces skew the stats (*divorce rate of 3rd marriages is 78%*)
 - 2. Surprisingly, on the surface one's religious beliefs make little difference
 - a. Members of non-denominational Bible churches have 34% divorce rate!
 - 1) Southern Baptists had the highest rate among denominations at 29%
 - 2) Atheists, agnostics, Catholics are LESS than national average (21%)
 - b. Top four state divorce rates are Nevada, Tennessee, Arkansas & Alabama
 - 1) OK, Nevada makes sense; what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas
 - 2) But Tennessee, Arkansas & Alabama? *The buckle of the Bible belt?*
 - 3. OK, there are some factors that somewhat mitigate force of these statistics
 - a. Some (20% according to Barna) become Christians after their divorce.
 - b. Christians tend to marry, not cohabit (*marriage does lead to divorce*)
 - c. Survey numbers are skewed by including *"nominal church members"*
 - 1) Divorced member who never/seldom attend are included in the stats
 - 2) Christian beliefs certainly won't help if you aren't practicing them
 - d. So even if Barna's statistics aren't the final word, they are disturbing

4. We don't need a scientific study to know divorce has increased in church
 - a. About 25 years ago, we had a reunion of my great-grandfather's family
 - 1) We counted 44 preachers among his sons, grandsons, great-grandsons
 - 2) At that time, there had not been a single divorce in that family
 - b. That's no longer in our family today; it's not true for some of preachers!
- C. Sermon series on "*Old/New Questions*" that everyone once knew the answer
1. The world has changed, and so these old questions are new again
 - a. We looked at "*Why believe the Bible*" and "*Must I be part of a church?*"
 - b. Also looked at "*Why is sex outside marriage and homosexuality wrong*"
 2. Today may be the hardest lesson to preach... or to hear. More personal
 - a. I assumed some here secretly struggled with sexual or homosexual sin
 - b. But I know some of you are divorced; I know some struggle in marriage
 3. So I want to address my two this morning with both tact and directness

II. Question #1: What Does God Think About Divorce

- A. Malachi writes about a unique situation— Israel displeases God ([Mal 2:13](#))
1. Why is that unique? Because it has nothing to do with worshipping idols!
 - a. They displease God by breaking faith with their wives ([Mal 2:14-15](#))
 - b. God is upset because they are divorcing "*the wife of your youth.*"
 - c. They are marrying younger wives ("*But you aren't wired for 220*")
 2. Malachi actually makes the same two points we saw Paul make in [1 Cor 6](#)
 - a. Like Paul, Malachi goes back to [Gen 2](#) and "*the LORD made them one*"
 - b. Like Paul, he reminds us of ownership, "*In flesh and spirit they are his*"
 3. **Result:** They seek God, but he remains distant because they "*break faith.*"
- B. Word "*break faith*" means "*to violate or act treacherously toward a covenant*"
1. This is the same word translated "*commit adultery*" in [Jeremiah 3:9](#)
 - a. The word isn't primarily a sexual term; it means breaking a covenant
 - b. Israel had broken its covenant with God and each other ([Mal 2:10](#))
 - c. Initially, they broke faith by marrying pagan women ([Mal 2:11](#))
 2. But that introduces Malachi's main complaint—divorcing their first wives

C. Malachi leaves no doubt how God feels about divorce (**Mal 2:16**)

1. God hates divorce! It is hard to see how God can be any clearer than that
 - a. We may struggle with broken promises, broken people in a broken world
 - 1) Our issues may seem so thorny and our problems may run so deep
 - 2) All the king's horses/men may not get Humpty Dumpty back together
 - b. But we must never, ever doubt what God's will is for our marriage
 - c. God hates divorce! Not just divorce in general; he hates every divorce.
2. Malachi's language here is so startling that we might miss import (**2:16b**)
"...and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment"
 - a. "*Covering with a garment*" was a reference to the marriage covenant
 - 1) Remember how Ruth proposed to Boaz (*essentially what she did*)
 - 2) She asked him to spread his garment over her... he did (**Ruth 3:9**)
 - 3) Ezekiel uses same idea for God's metaphorical betrothal (**Ezek 16:8**)
 - b. Malachi said that Israel was covering with violence like a garment
 - c. God sees divorce as an act of violence against your marriage and spouse
"I hate the violent dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage" (THE MESSAGE)
3. Malachi ends, "*So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith*"

D. While we'd like a few more examples, Jesus is clear on divorce (**Matt 5:31-32**)

1. The format in this part of Sermon on Mount, "*You have heard, I say to you*"
 - a. Jesus is contrasting, not OT to NT, but Pharisaic law with God's intent.
 - b. Pharisees were interested in the legalities of the divorce certificate.
 - c. Jesus doesn't focus legalities & loopholes but the sanctity of covenant.
2. Jesus says divorce **always** involves the sin of adultery, of breaking faith.
 - a. Of course, some divorces are caused by sexual unfaithfulness.
 - b. Even if not, divorce is still adultery for it is always "*breaking faith.*"
 - 1) Divorce, whether remarriage or not, breaks the marriage covenant.
 - 2) That is how God saw divorce in Malachi—they were breaking faith.
 - c. Jesus says to divorce a wife, even against her will, makes her adulteress.
 - 1) Why? Because divorce makes it impossible for her to keep faith.
 - 2) When she is remarried, she cannot go back to first covenant. (**Dt 24**)

III. Question #2: What Does God Think About Divorced People?

- A. One sermon answer all the questions and issues relating to subject divorce
1. We didn't look at the foundational OT text Jesus comments on (**Deut 24**)
 - a. We didn't look at the longer NT texts (**Matt 19:3-9** and **1 Cor 7:1-40**)
 - b. Small group will take a look at some of those (*aren't the leaders happy*)
 2. I think that too often we come to these texts asking the wrong question
 - a. The question we want, "*Under what circumstances is divorce OK?*"
 - 1) If we come to Bible looking for loopholes, we always will find them
 - 2) We can convince ourselves God wants us to be happy more than holy
 - b. But if we really want to know God's will, that is pretty straightforward
 - 1) God wants and expects us to keep faith with our vows made to him
 - 2) We aren't to break that covenant; we are to do all we can to keep it
- B. What does God think about the divorced? What about those already divorced?
1. I was taught (church & college) divorce was basically an *unforgivable sin*
 - a. Divorced had two options—remain single/celibate or reconcile to spouse
 - 1) If remarried, they had to divorce the 2nd spouse and reconcile to 1st
(*It never seemed to matter that this is only marriage circumstance condemned!*)
 - 2) I know of cases of people denied baptism or disfellowshipped
 - b. I was also taught accepting this view of divorce is test case or orthodoxy
 - c. Someone once said, "Some views need only to be explain to be refuted"
 2. Here's my advice on marriage, divorce and remarriage... at least today.
 - a. If you are married, then stay married. Period. God hates divorce.
 - b. If you are divorced and remarried, stay married. God hates divorce.
 - 1) Splitting up of marriages to unscramble the egg isn't in the Bible.
 - 2) Divorce always involves sin; the answer to sin is always the cross
 - c. If you are now divorced, but not yet remarried... God still hates divorce
 - 1) Do you have the right to be married? Or must you be single forever?
 - 2) See the elders! Actually, that depends on how you read some texts
- C. The church must be against divorce; the church must be for divorced people