

## MILLARD/BYNG MARRIAGE

### 23 September 2017

“You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So, guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ‘For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So, guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless’” [MALACHI 2:13-16].

The passage I have just read may seem to be a strange choice for a wedding celebration. However, it is appropriate to the day. Why should the preacher employ such a controversial passage from the Word? I am not seeking to be argumentative, curmudgeonly or outrageous. In the words of God, faithfully delivered through the Prophet, is a truth that seems to have been forgotten in this day. Malachi states that the LORD was witness between a husband and wife. God oversees marriage and He witnesses the way in which the husband and wife interact.

Moreover, according to the Living God, husband and wife are companions in the marriage; wives are not mere adjuncts to the marriage relationship—husbands and wives are partners. Peter will admonish husbands, saying, “You husbands must live with your wives in an understanding manner, as with a most delicate partner. Honor them as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may interfere with your prayers. Honour them as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” [1 PETER 3:7 ISV].

Malachi also says a husband and wife share this union by covenant. Emphasising this truth, the Prophet of God says, that a portion of God’s Spirit is in the union. This truth seems to have been forgotten in this day. Marriage has been reduced to a contract in the sight of our contemporaries. We hear affirmations at weddings that speak of the marriage lasting as long as love lasts. However, it should be evident that love can be a rather poor adhesive for holding a marriage together, if the lasting power of modern marriages is any indication. What is neglected, and what is presented in this passage of the Word, is that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. Marriage, according to what is written in this prophecy, is a covenant made not only between a husband and wife, but marriage is a covenant made in the presence of the LORD.

In these brief moments as we seek God’s blessing, I will remind you of the truths which this ancient prophet presented in the Name of the Living God. First, Malachi teaches that **husband and wife are to be companions**. It is somewhat popular to speak of our spouse as our best friend. Perhaps we mean it, though in many instances actions belie what is said. Nevertheless, husband and wife should be companions—and that is more than mere friendship.

Companionship suggests that they share their life as one. God created us as tripartite beings. We have a body. We are living souls. And we have a spirit created to know God. It should not be a surprise that the union of husband and wife entails a union of all three aspects of life. Physically, we share our bodies with one another. The Apostle admonishes husbands and wives, “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-5].

But we are living souls. We each have emotional components to our makeup. We each have intellectual interests. We each want to share our lives at a deeper level than merely hot, passionate coupling. Every woman wants her husband to know her. Peter admonishes husbands, “Husbands ... live with your wives in an understanding way” [1 PETER 3:7 CSB]. If consideration and understanding were an integral part of male life, we would not need this admonition; however, men do need the admonition to be considerate. In a similar fashion, Paul admonishes wives, “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” [EPHESIANS 5:33]. Again, if respect was innate, and not conditional, there would be no need for this counsel. This Apostolic counsel is nothing less than a reminder that a husband and wife must work at becoming one in life together.

There is yet that spiritual aspect of life that must be addressed. The Prophet has said that God makes husband and wife “one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union.” It is a reminder that the Christian couple has the Spirit of God living not only in each one, but that same divine Spirit superintends their marriage to ensure that God will be glorified in their life together.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. The logical conclusion is that those who have never known God have no possibility of sharing in this most intimate aspect of life—together or individually. The Christian couple are to grow together, becoming one in the Spirit of Christ. With the Apostle, I would remind you, Dan and Laura, that you are to live by the Spirit. For if you fail to live by the Spirit you shall face grievous hardship.

We read in the Word, “Live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want...” Christians are taught, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit” [GALATIANS 5:16, 17, 22-25 NET BIBLE].

The Prophet also points to *marriage as a covenant*. Christian marriage is a covenant. The contemporary view of marriage is that the couple makes a contract. In contradistinction, the Word of God is quite clear in presenting marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman—a covenant that is pronounced in the presence of the Living God. Though the world may reject this understanding, those who will honour God recognise that marriage is much more than a contract. A couple do not pledge their fidelity as long as they love; they vow devotion and love—before the Living God—as long as either shall live.

Though a contract can be annulled through judicial fiat, through neglect or through deceit, a covenant cannot be broken except by death. Since marriage is a covenant, and especially since marriage is a covenant entered into before Holy God, it cannot be broken without insult to the True and Living God. This is most serious ground on which we tread. I fear when I think of how casual the churches have become concerning the dissolution of marriage that they have become followers of culture rather than witnesses to the grace and majesty of the Living God.

God seeks *faithful commitment in the marriage relationship*. There must be no other person sharing this relationship except for a husband and wife. Infidelity, whether emotional or physical, will destroy intimacy. Though we recognise the danger of physical infidelity, many people seem to consider emotional infidelity unimportant. Pornography threatens a marriage precisely because it introduces a virtual world that is at best a gossamer film. Becoming emotionally vulnerable to someone else can threaten marriage just as readily. Dan, you are to love Laura without reservation, to be committed to her, and to her only. Laura, you are to love Dan without reservation, to be committed to him and to him only. God, through the prophet warns us, “Guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless” [MALACHI 2:14]. This command is emphasised when it is repeated in the sixteenth verse.

This is biblical marriage—husband and wife sharing life as companions, united by covenant before the Living God and committed to one another without reservation. This is the charge I deliver to you, Dan, and to you, Laura, companions in covenant before the Lord. Amen.