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SERMON TITLE: Old Fashioned Faithfulness
SCRIPTURE: Malachi 2:10-16
DATE: October 14, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Why Give? Series. Read also Hebrews 13:4-9

Prophets were not popular in biblical times. They were people who had an intense relationship with the Lord. They defended God by telling the people what they were doing wrong. That was annoying. For instance, “When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” He answered, “I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord!” (see 1 Kings 18:17-18) Every time someone even said Elijah’s name, Ahab would say, “I don’t like that guy. He’s always saying negative things against me.”

Even though they weren’t liked, prophets had a great deal of power and they spoke the truth. Sixteen prophets have their own books in the Old Testament and we are studying the last one. Malachi prophesied at a time when Israel was very discouraged. God was not giving them favor, so Malachi explained why.

You might say a prophet rights the ship that has leaned. A ship that is out of balance will list to one side and can only sail properly if it is brought back to an upright, vertical, position. Adjustments have to be made to return a ship to a balanced, upright position, and the same is true for believers sometimes.

Malachi’s issue in chapter two was marriage. The people had leaned. They had moved from the center of God’s will by divorcing their wives for pagan women.

Do you ever wonder about the importance of marriage in the church? Are we really meant to stay with one person all our lives? What if you get tired of them? What if you argue all the time? That can’t be healthy! Why bother getting married anyway?

We all know the story of Adam and Eve when the concept of marriage began. He was lonely. God noticed and decided to take action. The man had a spare rib. God took his spare rib and made a prime rib out of it. God gave him the best thing that ever happened to him! That’s it in a nutshell. Marriage began!

But, the couple was tempted, they fell to the temptation and the relationship between men and women has never been the same. They blamed each other. They were ashamed.

Although God was deeply and tenderly involved in the founding of this relationship, those two people who had been so ecstatic about each other suddenly became at odds. They were no longer able to stay in Eden and life would become hard.

Their ship leaned. Males and females have struggled to understand each other ever since. Throughout history we have had to periodically rebalance our marriage relation-“ship” to an upright position.

Israel found itself in a state of low morality and high promiscuity, as periodically happens in history. Let’s hear the story. READ Malachi 2:10-16

God mercifully sent Malachi to right their marital ship so they could understand and enjoy God’s original plan for marriage.

God covenanted to be involved in marriage. The marriage bond is a three-way relationship that is both physical and spiritual because we are both flesh and spirit.

A sexual relationship outside marriage hurts the spirit and the emotions of the person because God designed marriage to be a whole package.

Lifetime marital commitment matters. The entire culture is impacted by the strength of the covenant relationship—the permanency of marriage. All children (not just yours) are impacted by your committed marriage, and a society is weakened by divorce. Let’s examine why.

Faithfulness is core to marriage. Men were breaking faith: “You have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” (v. 14)

Your faithfulness affects your family, your neighbors, and your entire community. When you break faith in your core family unit, you will break faith elsewhere. Have you noticed the lack of commitment in companies? How about churches? What about commitments to jobs or volunteer work or community service?

Faithfulness is essentially giving. A faithful person is loyal, constant, devoted, true-blue, unswerving, a staunch supporter, steadfast, dedicated, committed; trusty, trustworthy, dependable, reliable.

Because of our weak human nature, we struggle to be faithful sometimes. But did you notice that God is a part of the relationship so that God can help you? Did you hear the connection between God and a married couple?

“Has not **the LORD** made them one? In flesh and spirit **they are his**” (15).

The Lord’s help is a huge asset if you are willing to listen to God’s leading.

I decided to turn to a favorite theologian, Dallas Willard, to get a clearer picture of God. Here are some of his words, with a few of mine included:

God is true to the facts; accurate in truth, precise in knowledge, exact in calculation, errorless, unerring, faultless, realistic, authentic, and close. **God is true**, absolute, without ulterior motives or foreign influence; God is the most pure, perfect, self-sufficient, needing nothing from those God has made. Though God does not need us, yet God desires to be made known and invites us to know him. God is right and good; powerful and accessible; knowledgeable and wise beyond anything you could ever comprehend. “God fills the space around you completely and it is from there that God sees and acts on your behalf.”¹

You see why his presence benefits you in your marriage?

Because God is faithful, God hates divorce. This is God’s reasoning:

“And why [did God make the two] one? Because he was seeking godly offspring” (v. 15).

God cares about the next generation.

When your marriage relation-“ship” leans and is unsalvageable, it affects the next generation. It’s not just you and your own children, but it affects our entire society.

For example, the divorce rate in 1900 was .07%, just slightly more than half a percent. The divorce rate in 1958 was 2.3%.² In recent years the divorce rate has jumped to 56% for first marriages and 70% for second or more marriages. Now, the marriage rate is declining and cohabitation is increasing.

Psychology Today recently published an article called “Why Moving In Together Is So Risky: Cohabitation has changed a lot about relationships and family formation.” The article was based on The CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) report released in May on the demographics of cohabitation from a group study. Here are the findings (quoting from the article):

- 64.5 percent of the entire sample has cohabited with a romantic partner at some point outside of marriage. Other estimates not based on this specific report are that the

percentage of people living together before tying the knot is now at an all-time high of over 70 percent.

- There remain some groups, particularly the more traditionally **religious**, who will not live together before marriage, but otherwise, cohabitation is common, and there is little stigma associated with it. . . . It is now normative behavior.
- Wendy Manning **has estimated** that, “The percentage of women ages 19-44 who have ever cohabited has increased by 82 percent over the past 23 years.” . . . People are delaying marriage, but they are not delaying sex, living together, or childbearing.
- 44 percent of the currently cohabiting group and 20 percent of the neither cohabiting nor married group has already lived with two or more partners. Ever higher levels of serial cohabitation mean that more people are on one of the pathways strongly associated with risks for family instability or divorce. Serial cohabitation is strongly associated with economic disadvantage among unmarried couples, lower odds of marriage, and increased odds of divorce.³

Our “ship” is leaning to the point of losing sight of one of the most stabilizing foundations in society. One of the greatest losses is losing sight of what it means to be faithful. To be faithful permeates the wellbeing of every aspect of a culture.

To be faithful is to be “giving.”

To abandon faithfulness and marriage to be ruled by fleshly desires is selfish.

Can you see why God is concerned?

This year we have had numerous wedding anniversaries of 45 years and over. This past week one couple here celebrated 70 years of marriage. Those of you who have been in it for the long haul—what witness can you be to young people around you?

Young people, strive for faithfulness. To do that, will you lay aside your own fleshly desires for the upright ship of marriage God’s design? If so, you will not only be blessed, but you will impact your whole community for the good. Follow the advice of God and “*do not be attracted by strange, new ideas*” (Hebrews 13:9), rather, heed Malachi’s words: “**So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.**”

AMEN

³ Scott M. Stanley and Galena K. Rhoades, “Why Moving In Together Is So Risky: Cohabitation has changed a lot about relationships and family formation,” Psychology Today, July 10, 2018, at <https://www.PsychologyToday.com/us/blog/sliding-vs-deciding/201807/why-moving-in-together-is-so-risky>, accessed October 8, 2018.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 67-68.

² 100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics 1867-1967, see https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_21/sr21_024.pdf, accessed October 10, 2018.