

Breaking Faith or Bearing Fruit?

Divorce. It is an ugly word... a sad word. It is about something breaking or fracturing and can involve neglect, bruising or a break in the wall of unity. It is a violation of someone or something that was once whole. We in the Christian world have primarily used the word for the end of a marriage in the courts of law and have taken the words of Malachi and said, "God hates divorce." Which, indeed, He does. However, I would suggest that we have not understood our God clearly in this area. We have severely limited His words to us and in doing so have limited our obedience to Him.

Most certainly, since the beginning, our God created man and woman in relationship. God said, "Let us make man in our image, *after our likeness*: and let *them* have dominion over... the earth" (Genesis 1:26). He created a "them"—single, yet plural—which means relationship. They were different and yet they were one. He told *them together* to bear fruit—which certainly means across all spectrums of human life, not just children. Multiply—make more of the beauty, the good that I have made... make more in My likeness. Fill the earth with My likeness. Take care of it and command it for good. They were blessed abundantly by God so they, in turn, might bless each other, the earth, and succeeding generations... multiplying the likeness of God everywhere they went.

God directed humans to rule the earth and the creatures on it but said nothing about ruling each other. Ruling was for things outside the relationship, done jointly, and the outcome was to be fruit and a subdued and nurtured world. Power was used to bless both each other and the



world... and it was good. In Genesis 2, we get some more information. Aloneness was declared bad, and a corresponding helper was needed. In essence, we have two servants joined together to produce and bear fruit, both living under the government of God. Instead, humans ignored the governance of God in their lives and put themselves in the place of power. They took it upon themselves to rule their choices, decisions, and each other. As a result, multiplying and bearing fruit of any kind became painful for all. By putting themselves in the place of God—seeking what they wanted rather than what He wanted—the joining of two as one is now marred. Divorce, wearing many different faces, entered the world.

Let's do a bit of a word study. The word divorce means disunion (the breaking of something) or a breach (a violation). It means to sever or separate something or to neglect or cause a gap in the wall. "Little" divorces happen all the time in many marriages—for years. How many times can skin be ruptured and still heal? How many

times can a wall of protection be destroyed before it cannot be built again? We have lost sight of the fact that our God hates divorces of all sizes and kinds.

Is it divorce to hide away every evening while looking at pornography behind a shut door and ignoring both wife and family? Is it divorce to batter a spouse with objects, fists or words? Is it divorce to bar your spouse from any access to money? Is it divorce to pour out rage and humiliation on your family and deceitfully present a different face at church? Have you not, in the words of Malachi, broken faith with your spouse and acted both treacherously and deceitfully?

God says, "For I hate sending away... and he who hath covered violence with his clothing..." (Malachi 2:16). Do not all of the previously mentioned involve a sending away? Where did we get the idea that the only thing we can call divorce is a piece of paper provided by a secular court?

Years ago, I had a phone conversation with a pastor about a woman

in his church who was being beaten and finally fled on foot in her robe at night to the police station. We found a safe house for her, and I advised her not to return home to her husband. She did not. The pastor who called me told me I was wrong not to urge her to return to her husband. I responded, "She has no husband." You see, to husband another is to preserve, save or safeguard. Jesus says His Father is the husbandman of the vineyard (John 15). He nurtures that vineyard so it is protected and bears abundant fruit. Any behavior in a relationship that does not look like Him is a rupture to that bond, whether it is words, fists, coercion or an abuse of power. Our God does, indeed, hate divorce, violations, deceit, rage or violations of any kind.

We have undoubtedly misled many suffering people with our rigid

interpretation of what God hates. In doing so, we have contributed to the damage of precious people created in the image of God and confused them about who He is and what He says. Also, we have failed those who abuse because we have minimized and glossed over matters that God hates, thereby not always preparing them a pathway for repentance, redemption, and reconciliation. We have not always protected the vulnerable, nor have we always confronted the abusive. Many times, we leave marriages saturated with sin and deceit without truth or care because we value the external appearance of marriage over the holiness of God lived out in hidden places.

In marriage, we are meant by God to oversee His world and multiply His likeness and beauty in all that we do—bearing fruit that carries the fragrance of Christ even behind closed

doors. The Bible commands us not to break faith with God (Numbers 5:6, Joshua 22:16), and He promises to never break faith with us (Psalm 89:33). As people helpers, let us courageously and compassionately live out the gracious and loving ministry of reconciliation He has given us (2 Corinthians 5:18) and encourage marriage partners not to break faith with their sacred covenant. ✝



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