

## Reworking Malachi 2:16 for our feminist era (part 2).

Dalrock | 7 October, 2016 | by Dalrock

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In [part one](#) of this series I explained how Malachi 2:16 is being reworked from a condemnation of divorce theft to *justification* for divorce theft. Thus Joel and Kathy Davisson have changed the meaning of “God hates divorce” to *God hates men who can't keep their wives happy* (all emphasis in this post is mine):

Men, obey the Word: Quit dealing treacherously with your wives. Why? Because if you don't, **you are going to end up divorced and God hates divorce. We are not going to applaud you as a great man of God anymore if you cannot keep one little wife happy.**

Treachery is expansively defined here to mean *anything that displeases a wife*. A husband's role in this new definition of Christian marriage is to follow the instruction of his wife on how to be married, since God has provided wives with all of the knowledge when it comes to marriage. Joel and Kathy explain this in their book [The Man of Her Dreams The Woman of His!](#)

God has equipped every woman with a marriage manual in her heart, designed to instruct her husband in how to meet her unique needs.

...

It is very simple. When your wife's marriage manual points out that you have violated her in some way, your job is to hear her heart and accept what it is that your personal marriage manual is saying to you. Your wife may not have a clue as to how to handle the household checkbook. She may not have a clue as to how to run a lawnmower. What she **does** have is that unique marriage manual in her heart for **your** marriage which is given to her from God. The way that a man becomes the man that God has called him to be is to become the husband his wife needs him to be. **The only way to become the husband our wife needs us to be is to read our personal marriage manual.** How do read that marriage manual? We listen to her heart.

While Joel and Kathy are probably the most over the top in how they present this new view of Christian marriage, what they are teaching is the mainstream conservative Christian view of marriage. I promised in the first post to include another example of this in part two, and the example I'll share is from Pastor Sam Powell in his post [God Hates Divorce, part two](#) (see part one [here](#)).

Pastor Powell is a bit more circumspect, but he is selling the same message as Joel and Kathy. If a wife is unhappy in her marriage, it is evidence that her husband is hateful and treacherous to her. Powell explains that God created Adam and Eve to have a perfect marriage, but because men are sinful they hate their wives and treat them treacherously. Powell claims that instead of hating divorce, God is saying men need to make their wives happy or they deserve to end up divorced:

...sin entered the world and **men became treacherous, violating that harmony, hating their wives and oppressing them, rather than loving them.** This should not be, especially among God's people.

**And now we get to verse 16 and see that it makes perfect sense. If you hate her that much, set her free!** Be open with it. You put on one front but behind closed doors you are something else entirely. Clothe yourself with the violence that defines your life and set your wife free!

So is God condoning divorce? No. That isn't really the point of the passage. The point is the last part of the verse: “therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.”

...He hates lying and deceit. He hates the proud, treacherous heart. He hates the entitlement mentality that says “I am; and there is none like me!” God hates the hatred that a man has for his wife, causing him to rail at her, to oppress her, to take a mistress or another wife. **He hates the disharmony that wicked men cause in their home.**

If you insist on treating your wife like this, set her free. It will be the only decent thing you’ve ever done.

What would be far better, though, is if you took heed to your spirit and quit treating her this way. If you refuse to do that, don’t think that God doesn’t hear the voice of your wife pouring out her tears on the altar. God hears that, and will not allow those tears to go unanswered.

Why isn’t God hearing your prayers? Why doesn’t he accept your sacrifices? Because of how you treat your wife.

If you hate her that much, set her free.

Pastor Powell then anticipates the objection to his claim that marriage vows are conditional on the wife’s happiness:

But then, you say, how will we keep our wives from leaving us? First, I have to say to you that if force and intimidation are the only tools in your arsenal to keep your marriage, then you need to reevaluate your existence as a human being.

Instead of asking that question, ask instead, “How can I make my wife WANT to stay married to me?”

Paul answers this in Ephesians 5. Love your wives, as Christ loved the church.

This is the same message as the one I quoted at the top of the post from Joel and Kathy. *Make your wife happy or God says you will deserve it when she divorces you.* This is likewise built on the claim that a wife will be happy if her husband loves her. Powell repeats this claim that a wife who is loved will be happy frequently in his writings on marriage. In [Headship is not Hierarchy](#) Powell writes:

...you can see a woman who is loved by her husband. She is alive, fully human, confident, and joyfully doing whatever work God has called her to with spirit and life.

Note that you could easily reword this into the language that Joel and Kathy use; the wife is a *responder*. Powell explains this in more detail in his post [To the Newly Married](#). The key to a Christian marriage, he tells us, is for the husband to learn how to make his wife happy:

This is where it gets endlessly wonderful. Women are fascinating creatures; each one created just a little different. They are almost like a puzzle to be solved... If you want a blessed and beneficial marriage, learn how to make your wife exult. What makes her tick? What does she fear? What does she dream of?

...Guys, do away with the jokes about not understanding women. You are commanded to do just that. But to do that you have to put off your own self-absorption, and figure out how to listen. Listen with your ears, with your eyes, even with your finger-tips. She’ll let you know what causes her to exult, but you have to tune in.

...Don’t try to learn about your wife from stereotypes, books (especially of the “women’s place is in the home” variety) or locker room gossip. This is your wife you are learning about and she is the only one who can show you what causes her to exult. You are on a wonderful journey of discovery together.

As Joel and Kathy say, every wife has a marriage manual written in her heart, from God.

Powell closes his advice to newly married couples by explaining that if their marriage ever becomes “stagnant”, this is a sign that the husband isn’t loving his wife enough and isn’t listening to the marriage manual in her heart. He needs to repent and learn to make her happy before she decides to divorce him:

If you have been married for a while and find your love growing stagnant, it is probably because you didn’t heed God’s command. Repent and ask your wife’s forgiveness for failing to understand her. Then start your year now. Turn the TV off. Give up boys’ nights out, and **learn how to cause your wife to rejoice. It may not be too late.**

**See Also:**

- [Reframing Christian Marriage](#)
- [Lowering the boom.](#)

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