

The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible and Malachi 2:16: A Brief Response



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The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCS), completed in 2004, is a commendable English translation of Scripture. Yet, many people are surprised to discover the *Holman Christian Standard* translation of Mal 2:16 is somewhat different from the familiar injunction against divorce found in most English translations. For example, the NASB translation of Mal 2:16 says, “‘For I hate divorce,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” In contrast, the HCS translation of Mal 2:16 says, “‘If he [the husband] hates and divorces his wife,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘he covers his garment with injustice,’ says the LORD of Hosts. Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously.” Two other recent English translations render Mal 2:16 in a way similar to the HCS: The ESV (2001) and the recent revision of the NIV (2010). The *HCS Study Bible*, released in the Fall of 2010, offers a brief explanation of the HCS rendering of Malachi 2:16:

This verse [Mal 2:16] ends by repeating verse 15b with one significant change. After speaking to “you” in verses 13–15a, verse 15b switches back to third person “he” as in verses 11–12, ending literally, “and with the wife of your youth let *him* not act treacherously.” Then after a conjunction opening verse 16 (meaning “because,” “if,” “when,” “that,” or “indeed”) is a verb that clearly means “*he hates*,” although most translations change it to “*I hate*.”

But the subject apparently is the one who “acts treacherously,” and who also **covers his garment with injustice**. The one speaking is **the LORD God of Israel**, and contrary to the KJV, NKJV, etc., there is no indication of indirect discourse [“says that”], so God cannot be the subject of “he hates.”¹

Thus, the *HCS Study Bible* argues strongly in favor of the HCS translation of Malachi 2:16a and infers that other translations are wrong. The author of the *HCS Study Bible* notes on Malachi is E. Ray Clendenen, who also was the Associate General Editor/Translator for the HCS project. Clendenen’s arguments in the study notes are a summary of his more extensive comments in his 2004 commentary on Malachi in the *New American Commentary* series.

Is the *HCS Study Bible* note correct? I suggest the *HCS Study Bible* offers an unbalanced presentation of the questions at hand. Thus, I contend that the *HCS Study Bible* would better serve its intended audience by reflecting balance in its study notes. To demonstrate this, I will offer a brief response to the *HCS Study Bible* comments on Mal 2:16. I will do this by comparing different translations of Mal 2:16, summarizing translation difficulties associated with the verse, and offering a brief comparison of the ethical implications of the different translations of Mal 2:16. In this article, I will refer to the translations of Mal 2:16 that say something like “I hate divorce” as the “common” translation and I will refer to translations that say something like “If the husband hates and divorces his wife” as the “recent” translation. These terms are not meant to imply the superiority of one translation over another, but are intended to be neutral terms. The majority of my comments will focus on Mal 2:16 and I will not attempt to exegete the entire textual unit of Mal 2:10–16.

I. MALACHI 2:16: DIFFERENT TRANSLATION

Mal 2:16 is the concluding verse of the larger textual unit, Malachi 2:10–16. The whole context is a denunciation from God of the treachery, profanity, violence, and selfish approach to marriage held by the men in post-exilic Israel. The Hebrew text of Mal 2:16 has been described as “quite clipped, and several words must be supplied by any translation to

¹ E. Ray Clendenen, “Study Notes on Malachi,” *The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 1593.

make readable English.”² One should remember that the vowel points are a relatively late rabbinic commentary on the unpointed Biblical text, the vowel points being added sometime between 500–800 AD by the Masoretes. This noted, the MT of Mal 2:16a reads:

כִּי־שָׂנֵא שְׁלַח אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִסָּה חָמָס
עַל־לְבוּשׁוֹ אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

The difficulty of translating Mal 2:16a centers more specifically around the Hebrew verb שָׂנֵא (*sānē*), which is a Qal masculine third-person singular meaning “he hates” according to the Masoretes. Because שָׂנֵא is a third person singular, translating Mal 2:16a as “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel” is difficult because the pronoun “I” in reference to Yahweh is first person singular. With this in mind, a somewhat wooden, word-for-word translation of Malachi 2:16a would be, “‘For he hates divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel.” As I will show later, the competing English translations represent different solutions to the grammatical difficulties inherent in the text.

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), LXX, Vulgate, and Targum Jonathan all include textual variants of Mal 2:16. A variant reading of Mal 2:16a found in 4QXII says, “But if you hate [your wife] divorce [her]!”³ The LXX textual tradition has two different readings. The majority of the LXX family of witnesses to Mal 2:16 (LXX LW) say something similar to 4QXII: “If you hate her . . . divorce her.”⁴ A different tradition of the LXX (LXX~~ABQV~~) reads, “‘But if, having hated, you divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘then iniquity will cover his garments.’”⁵ The

² Robert Alden, *Malachi* (ed. Frank Gaebelin; 12 vols.; *Expositor's Bible Commentary*; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 7:717.

³ This translation is from *The Jewish Study Bible* (eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999). 4QXII is a manuscript consisting of twenty-one fragments and was at one time a complete scroll of the Minor Prophets (Russell Fuller, “Text-Critical Problems in Malachi 2:10–16,” *JBL* 110.1 [1991]: 47). Seven manuscripts were found in Cave 4 of Qumran and they are labeled 4QXIIa–g. In many discussions of Mal 2:16, the text in question is often simply called “4QXII.”

⁴ This translation from Douglas Stuart, *Malachi*, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 1342.

⁵ This is Clendenen's translation in E. Ray Clendenen, *Malachi* (New American Commentary 21a; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 363.

Vulgate preserves a reading of Mal 2:16a very similar to the majority tradition of the LXX and says, *Cum odio habueris dimitte*, or “If you hate, divorce!”⁶ Targum Jonathan is an Aramaic translation of *Nevi'im* (prophets) from sometime in the 4th–5th Century AD. It preserves a variant reading of Mal 2:16a similar to those found above and says, “For if you hate her, divorce her.”⁷

How do we account for the variant readings of Mal 2:16? The most common explanation among scholarship is that the MT is in fact closest to the original and the other variants represent later attempts either to lessen the force of the strong condemnation of divorce in Mal 2:16 or to bring Mal 2:16 more in line with particular understandings of Deut 24:1–4. For example, in her 1972 commentary on Malachi Joyce Baldwin commented on the textual variants and suggested, “Evidently the text [of Mal 2:16] suffered early at the hands of some who wanted to bring Malachi’s teaching into line with that of Deuteronomy 24:1, which permitted divorce.”⁸

Some early English Bibles followed the textual variants of the LXX and Vulgate. The Matthew’s Bible was an English translation first published in 1537 by John Rogers, Thomas Matthew being his pseudonym. Roger’s translation of Malachi was based on the Vulgate and his translation of Mal 2:16a reflects this, saying, “If thou hateth her put her away sayeth the Lord God of Israel.” The 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible had a similar reading of Mal 2:16: “‘If thou hateth her, put her away,’ saith the Lord God of Israel, ‘yet he covereth the injury under his garment,’ saith the Lord of holies: therefore keep yourselves in your spirit and transgress not.”⁹

As noted above, most English translations now fall into two categories concerning the translation of Mal 2:16. The common English translation understands Yahweh to be the subject of the first clause of Mal 2:16 with “hate” functioning as a verb and “divorce” as an object.

⁶ This reading is maintained in the Catholic Douay-Rheims version (completed 1610) which says: “When thou shalt hate her, put her away, saith the Lord the God of Israel.”

⁷ Leivy Smolar and Moses Aberdach, *Studies in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (ed. Harry M. Orlinsky; New York, NY and Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Ktav, 1983), 3.

⁸ Joyce Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1972), 262.

⁹ I have not maintained the older spelling found in the text of the 1560 Geneva Bible. The footnote supplied for Mal 2:16 in the Geneva Bible says, “Not that he allows divorce, but of two faults he shows which is the less.”

The “recent” English translations understand a devious husband to be the subject of the first clause of Mal 2:16 with “hate” and “divorce” serving as parallel verbs in some way (see the chart below for which versions support the “common” or “recent” translation).

In the chart below, it can be seen that most English translations prior to the last decade favor the common translation in which God is the intended subject of the verb *hate* in Mal 2:16. However, the last decade has seen momentum gaining for the recent translation. One of the earliest references in English to the recent translation is the 1881 English translation of Ewald’s 1868 *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament*: “For he who from hatred breaketh wedlock, saith Yahvé Israel’s God, —he covereth with cruelty his garment, saith Yahvé of Hosts: so take heed for your spirit’s sake and be not unfaithful!”¹⁰ Powis suggested similar wording in his 1912 volume in the *International Critical Commentary* and translated Mal 2:16 as follows: “For one who hates and sends away covers his clothing with violence, says Yahweh of hosts.”¹¹ More recently in 1995 David Petersen suggested Mal 2:16 be translated, “‘Divorce is hateful,’ says Yahweh, God of Israel. ‘It is like a garment that covers wrongdoing,’ says Yahweh of hosts. ‘Preserve your vitality! Don’t act faithlessly.’”¹²

Two of the translations that favor the recent approach, the English Standard Version and the Holman Christian Standard, include textual footnotes for Mal 2:16 acknowledging debate about the passage:

ESV: Probable meaning (compare Septuagint and Deuteronomy 24:1–4); or “The LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce, and him who covers.”

HCS: Or The LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce and the one who. . .

The ESV note indicates that the translation team arrived at its conclusion based on the LXX and Deut 24:1–4. As I will show shortly,

¹⁰ Georg Heinrich August von Ewald (1803–1875), *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Frederick Smith; 5 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1881), 5:81.

¹¹ John Merlin Powis Smith, *Malachi* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 55–56.

¹² David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox, 1995), 194. Petersen is Professor of Old Testament in the Candler School of Theology of Emory University.

many advocates of the recent translation perceive an inconsistency between the divorce stipulations of Deut 24:1–4 and the criticism of divorce inherent in the common translation of Mal 2:16.

II. TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES

The grammatical arguments for and against the common and recent translations revolve primarily around the Hebrew conjunction *kî*, and the Hebrew words *sānē'* and *šallah*.

The Hebrew Conjunction kî

Mal 2:16 begins with the with the Hebrew conjunction כִּי (*kî*). The recent translations of Mal 2:16 understand *kî* in a conditional sense, thus the HCS begins Mal 2:16a as “**If** (*kî*) he hates and divorces his wife.”¹³ However, the Hebrew word *kî* can also carry a causal sense, thus the majority of translations (the LORD as the subject) begin Mal 2:16a with something like, “**For** (*kî*) I [the LORD] hate divorce.” Both the NIV and NET understand the LORD as the subject and simply leave the *kî* untranslated and render Mal 2:16 as, “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel.”¹⁴

The Hebrew verb סָנֵה' (sānē')

Debate over the proper English translation of Mal 2:16a centers more specifically around the Hebrew verb סָנֵה' (*sānē'*), a Qal perfect, masculine third person singular meaning “he hates.” As noted above, because סָנֵה' is a third person singular, advocates of the recent approach question translating Mal 2:16a with the LORD as the subject since “the LORD” would require first person singular. So, to translate in the common sense (“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel) means that one has a first person noun connected with a third person verb. The HCS attempts to rectify this problem making an unscrupulous husband the subject of the verb “hates,” resulting in the translation, “If he hates and divorces [his wife],’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘he covers his garment with injustice,’ says the LORD of Hosts.”

¹³ The LXX also translates the *kî* in a conditional sense. See above discussion concerning the LXX and Mal 2:16.

¹⁴ The conjunction *kî* can be adversative too, introducing a clause that expresses strong opposition.

The Hebrew Word שָׁלַח (šallah)

Debate about the English translation of Malachi 2:16 also involves how to understand the word שָׁלַח (*šallah*), which means “putting away” or “divorce.” Here in Mal 2:16a, שָׁלַח (*šallah*) is a Piel infinitive. The basic meaning is “to send away,” which is clearly used with the idea of divorce in mind.¹⁵ Both the HCS and the ESV understand “divorce” to be another verb connected with the husband, thus the translation “He [the husband] hates and divorces.” In contrast, the common view understands שָׁלַח (*šallah*) as the object of the verb “hates.”

Other Translation Issues

Other translation issues surrounding the correct English rendering of Mal 2:16a are related to the relationship between Mal 2:15 and 2:16 and the relationship between Malachi 2:16a—“I hate divorce” or “If he hates and divorces”—and the next clause in Mal 2:16 which makes reference to covering one’s garment with violence.

Clendenen’s note in the *HCS Study Bible* is not as clear as one would hope concerning the relationship between Mal 2:15 and 2:16. In the *HCS Study Bible* note, Clendenen says, “But the subject apparently is the one who ‘acts treacherously.’”¹⁶ In this context, Clendenen is referring to the subject of the second clause of Mal 2:15 (HCS): “So watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously against the wife of your youth.” This phrase is repeated almost verbatim at the end of 2:16 (HCS): “Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously.” Clendenen’s point is obscured in the *HCS Study Bible* because the HCS arrangement of verses contradicts the point he is trying to make: Clendenen believes that Mal 2:15b–16 should be considered as one textual unit, a point he clearly makes in his commentary on Malachi.¹⁷ However, in the HCS, Mal 2:14–15 is set apart as one paragraph while Mal 2:16 is set off as an individual unit of thought. Because of the contradiction between the HCS’s demarcation of paragraphs and Clendenen’s comments, the average reader may find Clendenen’s explanation difficult to follow.

¹⁵ See the same word also in reference to divorce in Isa 50:1.

¹⁶ Clendenen, “Study Notes on Malachi,” 1593.

¹⁷ Clendenen, *Malachi*, 357ff. Petersen also arranges Mal 2:15b – 16 as one textual thought-unit (Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 & Malachi*, 204).

Mal 2:16 also connects divorce to a man “covering his garment with violence.” Explanations abound for the meaning of the phrase. Andrew Hill comments on the difficulties associated with the phrase and says, “The expression ‘for violence covers his clothing’ is unique to Malachi 2:16 in the MT . . . The meaning of the clause is disputed and the culling of interpretive stances among biblical commentators yields no consensus (as attested by the diverse translations in the English versions).”¹⁸ “Covering his garment with violence” possibly alludes to the practice of a man throwing his garment over a woman he intends to marry such as is seen in Ruth 4:9. The common translation understands the phrase about “covering one’s garment with violence” to be an explanation of the LORD’s hatred for divorce. The recent translations of Mal 2:16 see 2:16a—“If he hates and divorces his wife”—to be the protasis and Malachi 2:16b—“he covers his garment with injustice”—to be the apodosis in the conditional clause.

III. ADVOCATES PRO AND CON

Two professors from Covenant Theological Seminary have been very influential advocates of the recent translation of Mal 2:16: David Clyde Jones¹⁹ and C. John Collins. In a very brief 1989 article in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* titled “A Note on the LXX of Malachi 2:16,” Jones argued that the LXX rightly understood actually supports the recent translation of Mal 2:16. Jones says the correct translation of the LXX for 2:16a is not, “If you hate, divorce!” but instead should be translated, “If hating you divorce.”²⁰ C. John “Jack” Collins²¹ advocated the recent translation of Mal 2:16 in a 1994 *Presbyterion* article titled, “The (Intelligible) Masoretic Text of Malachi 2:16, or, How Does God Feel About Divorce?” Building on the previous article by his colleague Jones, Collins argues against the way the common translation addresses the oddities in the MT and instead offers his own resolution:

¹⁸ Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi* (AB 25D; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 252.

¹⁹ David Clyde Jones is now Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ethics at Covenant Theological Seminary.

²⁰ David Clyde Jones, “A Note on the LXX of Malachi 2:16,” *JBL* 109.4 (1990): 683.

²¹ Collins is currently a professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary.

Suppose we took *šallah* as a Piel perfect, with a rare but not wholly unattested *a* in the first syllable rather than the usual *i*. We would then have two asyndetic perfects following the *kî* (that is, perfects denoting consecutive past actions, without conjunction). The subject of the verbs is not specified; it is simply “he” or “someone” (presumably a hypothetical member of the restoration community).²²

Collins then argues that his resolution of the difficulties related to the Hebrew text explains the LXX reading more clearly. Thus, Collins arrives at a translation that is quite different from “I hate divorce” or “God hates divorce”: Instead, the subject of “hates” is a husband who is treating his wife badly. It is of some interest to note that Collins was also the OT chairman for the ESV translation team.

Andrew E. Hill suggests a slightly different approach to the common translation of Mal 2:16. In a manner slightly similar to Clendenen, Hill looks to Mal 2:15 to supply the subject for the first clause of Malachi 2:16. But Hill suggests that the reference to God as “the One” in Malachi 2:15 supplies the right noun for the phrase of 2:16 which he translates as following: “‘Indeed, [The One] hates divorce!’ Yahweh, the God of Israel, has said. ‘For he covers his clothing with violence,’ Yahweh of Hosts has said. So guard yourselves in your own spirit! You shall not break faith!’”²³ Hill addresses the arguments of both Jones and Collins and comments on his own translation by saying:

This reading [using the “One” from verse 15 as the subject] preserves the integrity of the MT, rendering “cosmetic surgery” of the text unnecessary . . . Furthermore, this reading reveals still another example of the prophet’s literary artistry in the juxtaposition of “The One” (Yahweh) and “sending away” (i.e., the dissolution of “one” through divorce).²⁴

The following chart summarizes the different approaches to translating Mal 2:16:

²² C. John Collins, “The (Intelligible) Masoretic Text of Malachi 2:16 or, How Does God Feel About Divorce?” *Presbyterion* 20.1 (1994): 37–38. “Asyndetic” refers to the omission of conjunctions from constructions in which they would normally be used.

²³ Hill, *Malachi*, 221.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

	Common	Recent
Conjunction	Causal- “For”	Conditional – “If”
Subject	Yahweh / “I”	Husband / “He”
Verb(s)	Hate	Hates and Divorces
Object	Divorce	"His Wife" (Supplied/ Understood)
Advantage	Majority of Modern English Translations prior to Twenty-First Century	If LXX is understood in a particular way, the LXX supports
Difficulty	3rd Person verb with 1st person subject	Makes divorce another verb; Must Supply object not in text; Awkward rendering of direct speech from God.
Bibles	KJV ²⁵ (1611), ASV (1901), RSV (1952), NASB (1971), CEV (1995), NIV (1978), NKJV (1982), NRSV (1989), NLT (1996), NET (2005)	<i>The Old Testament: An American Translation</i> ²⁶ (1927), NEB (1972), ESV (2001), HCS (2004), NIV 2010
Scholarly Advocates	Walter Kaiser, Pieter A. Verhoef, Andrew Hill	E. Ray Clendenen, C. John Collins, David Clyde Jones

IV. POSSIBLE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMPETING TRANSLATIONS OF MALACHI 2:16

Both the common and recent translations of Mal 2:16 place a casual attitude towards divorce in a very negative light. Advocates of the

²⁵ The 1611 edition of the KJV including the following footnote for Mal 2:16: “Or, if he hate her, put her away” (*The Holy Bible 1611 Edition King James Version* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982]).

²⁶ *The Old Testament: An American Translation* (ed. J. M. Powis Smith; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1927). This version was later published with the NT edited by Goodspeed and is known as *The Complete Bible: An American Translation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1935, 1939).

common approach understand Mal 2:16 to be a reflection of God's basic attitude towards divorce. In his major work *True Sexual Morality*, Heimbach favors the common translation of Mal 2:16 and says, "[God] truly hates divorce because he sees it as a form of violence (Mal. 2:16)."²⁷ Walter Kaiser advocates the common translation and concludes, "Yet when God emphatically states, 'I hate divorce' (Mal. 2:16), we may also gather how passionately strong is his deep desire to see that marriage covenants succeed. Everything that frustrates that goal is the object of his holy hatred—no more and no less. This statement of Mal. 2:16, however, must not be taken to mean that there is *nothing* that could provide grounds for any divorce."²⁸

Most advocates of the recent translation of Mal 2:16 find the moral application to be a warning about the destructive nature of hatred in a marriage along with the corollary practice of easy divorce. Clendenen himself follows his explanation of the HCS translation for Mal 2:16 with this moral application:

This verse specifies how wives were being betrayed. Their husbands were "hating" so as to "divorce" (a Hb infinitive) them for no legitimate reason (Dt 24:3), which was a heinous injustice. Such a cold-blooded and unscrupulous traitor to his marital responsibilities, who would deny his wife the very things he had pledged to provide—devotion, care, companionship, protection, intimacy, peace, justice (Gn. 2:24; Ex 21:10; Dt 22:13-19; Pr 5:15-20)—stood condemned by God, and he wore the stain of his crime like a garment for all to see (Ps 73:6).²⁹

In a similar train of thought, Collins concludes his article in favor of the recent translation by saying, "He who is wise will watch for the first stirrings of resentment, which might turn into dislike, and repent of it immediately, lest he deal treacherously with her whom the Lord has given to be a blessing."³⁰ Köstenberger and Jones in *God, Marriage, and Family* favor the recent translation of Mal 2:16 and assert the passage

²⁷ Daniel Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 202.

²⁸ Walter Kaiser, "Divorce in Malachi 2:16," *Criswell Theological Review* 2.1 (1987): 80. Emphasis in original.

²⁹ Clendenen, "Study Notes on Malachi," 1593.

³⁰ Collins, "The (Unintelligible) Masoretic Text of Malachi 2:16," 40.

teaches “God does not approve of divorce motivated by hatred.”³¹ Douglas Stuart favors the recent approach and concludes his discussion by saying: “Finally, what constitutes the ethical teaching of this verse? Does it really prohibit God’s people from ‘no-fault’ divorces based on ‘irreconcilable differences,’ as Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5 and 19 also does at the very least? The answer must be that it does. . . . Aversion divorce is unfaithfulness. ‘Don’t be unfaithful!’ warn the final words of the disputation.”³² David Clyde Jones goes further and suggests the recent translation of Mal 2:16 does not weaken the moral stance against divorce, but actually strengthens it by being more definite and concludes by saying, “Divorce for ‘hatred’ is a radical breach of fidelity; it is ‘violence’ against the companion to whom one has been joined in marriage.”³³

Both approaches to Mal 2:16 communicate a strong warning from God concerning the practice of frivolous divorce.³⁴ The ethical implication of the common translation is that Mal 2:16 reflects God’s basic attitude towards divorce. The ethical implication of the recent translation is that Mal 2:16 is a warning to men who divorce their wives for frivolous and self-centered reasons. Both the common and recent translations provide a needed corrective in our society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

There are good reasons why Mal 2:16 is translated in both the traditional and recent ways. Therefore, one’s stance concerning the correct translation should not be a test for “ethical” orthodoxy. Both approaches to Mal 2:16 infer strong moral aversion to divorce. The entire textual unit of Mal 2:10–16 has several well-documented translational difficulties, but clearly criticizes the flippant attitude towards marriage

³¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 46. See also note 12 on page 404 where the authors make clear that they favor the recent translation of Mal 2:16.

³² Douglas Stuart, *Malachi*, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas McComiskey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 1343–1344.

³³ David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 192.

³⁴ The widely read Christian Ethics textbook, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, only addresses Mal 2:16 very briefly in both the 1993 and 2010 editions (John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg (1938–2005), *Ethics for a Brave New World* [2nd ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 808, n. 43).

among men in the post-exilic community. The main concern in Mal 2:10–16 seems to be the close parallel between marriage and God’s relationship with His people. Therefore massive dysfunctions in marriage are illustrative of massive problems in the relationship with God.³⁵ More broadly, a theme within Malachi is that God’s people should give their very best to God, not their second best. Mal 2:10–16 stresses that faithfulness to one’s marriage vows is a way we give our very best to God.

A strong tradition within English Bible translations understands Mal 2:16a to say something like, “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel” or “The LORD God of Israel says He hates divorce.”³⁶ While I understand and appreciate the seriousness of those who advocate the recent translation, I favor the common approach and reject the idea that translating Mal 2:16a with Yahweh as the subject is “arbitrary.”³⁷ I do not believe the MT pointing of אָשֵׁן necessarily precludes the common translation since there is precedence for God referring to himself in the third person within the text of Malachi itself at Mal 1:9. The NRSV comes close to the intent: “For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.” Instead of being arbitrary, the common translation fits as a strong conclusion to the entire passage. Though both the recent and common translations have difficulties, I think that the common translation is in fact much closer to the intent of Malachi. I concur with Verhoef who says, “We prefer the reading according to which God is the subject, and only the Masoretic punctuation is altered to provide a participle with a suppressed personal

³⁵ I am indebted to my colleague Blake Hearson for this insight.

³⁶ In an online article, C. John Collins defends at length the ESV’s translation of Mal 2:16 and places blame for confusion about the correct English translation of the verse on the KJV (C. John Collins, “Malachi 2:16 Again.” [cited 16 Dec 2010]; Online: <http://www.esv.org/assets/pdfs/malachi.2.16.collins.pdf>). Collins says a similar thing on the Crossway Publishing website, “The translation of this verse found in the AV . . . with God hating divorce, represents a departure from the translation tradition of the previous centuries. (C. John Collins, “FAQ: Malachi 2:16,” [cited 16 Dec 2010]; Online: www.crossway.org/blog/2005/08/faq-malachi--16-collins. I find Collins’ argument here to be frustrating because he *does not* tell the reader that the “translation tradition of the previous centuries” to which he refers was confused as well.

³⁷ This is one of Beth Glazier-McDonald’s critiques of the traditional translation. See Beth Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 110.

pronoun: ‘I hate, I am hating.’”³⁸ This also makes sense when the fact that Mal 2:16a is intended to be a first person speech from the God of Israel, as is made clear in the verse as a whole.³⁹ Verhoef’s argument is partly based on the reality that both the common and the recent translations will have to supply some words to smooth out the translation. For example, consider the HCS translation of the first clause of Mal 2:16: “‘If he hates and divorces [his wife],’ says the LORD God of Israel.” Notice that words “his wife” are in brackets, indicating they have been added by the HCS translators in order to supply an object for the verb “hates”.

At the same time, Clendenen seems to be correct when he argues that Mal 2:15b–16 should be seen as one textual unit. The phrase, “Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously,” forms a kind of *inclusio* and brackets the conclusion of the entire passage, Mal 2:10–16. In this way, God’s aversion to the divorce practices of the post-exilic men is more clearly emphasized.

Perhaps some of the textual ambiguity in the passage is related to Malachi’s indignation at the men of the post-exilic community. The terse response of Malachi grows progressively more intense throughout Mal 2:10–16 reaching a crescendo with unequivocal exclamation that “Yahweh hates divorce!” The strength of God’s condemnation is reinforced by the fact that Mal 2:16 is one of only two places in the Minor Prophets where God is called, “LORD God of Israel.” Furthermore, it does not seem that a new topic is being introduced in 2:16a, which a conditional translation of *kî* could possibly, but not necessarily, infer. On the contrary, Mal 2:16 is the climax to all that has been said previously in 2:10–15, thus the causal sense of *kî* seems to be the right translation. Mal 2:16 provides the cause for God’s strong moral disapproval of the low view of marriage described in 2:10–15: Because the LORD hates divorce, your actions are wrong! Malachi blends an incisive theological critique of a sloppy approach to marriage and divorce with appropriate moral indignation—a message delivered with startlingly blunt force.

Some disinclination towards the common translation lies in the way Mal 2:16 has been abused within some churches to imply that God not only hates divorce, but He also hates divorced people. This misguided understanding of Mal 2:16 is certainly inconsistent with the broader

³⁸ Peter A. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 278.

³⁹ Andrew Hill’s view may work better with a participle: “The One hates.” See comments above.

witness of Scripture. Jesus Christ himself demonstrated grace and mercy to a woman who had been divorced five times (John 4), clearly showing God's love for divorced people. But if the common translation is correct, then two questions of moral importance emerge: First, why does God say He hates divorce and, second, how does one reconcile the traditional understanding of Mal 2:16 with other passages of Scripture (e.g., Deut 24:1–4; Matt 5:31–32, 19:1–12; 1 Cor 7) which seem to allow for divorce in limited circumstances?

The answer to the first question lies within Mal 2:16 itself: God hates divorce because of its consequences. Specifically, Mal 2:16 says divorce “covers a man's garment with violence.” In Malachi's day, the post-exilic men treated their wives in such a terrible manner that God refers to their actions as “violent.” Thus in some way, Mal 2:16 insists frivolous divorce is itself a form of domestic violence, a moral inference one can draw from both translation approaches. I suggest the exploitation of women condemned in Mal 2:10–16 is tangent to the current exploitation of women in our culture in which men often use easy divorce as a way to exchange a faithful wife for another woman. There are also possible parallels to modern domestic violence in which a woman lives with an intimate terrorist who uses violence as a tool of manipulation.

The second question concerning the supposed incompatibility of the traditional translation of Mal 2:16 with other passages about divorce in Scripture is an often repeated objection from those favoring the recent translation. For example, one reason Gordon Hugenberger rejects the common translation is it “necessarily involves a conflict with the seemingly lenient attitude toward divorce in Deut 24:1–4.”⁴⁰ In response, it is not inconsistent for God to express His disapproval of divorce in general while allowing for divorce in narrow situations. In fact, God's moral disapproval of men “covering garments with violence” seems consistent with a narrow allowance for divorce. Davis reflects my own thoughts when he comments on Mal 2:16 and says, “While God might tolerate divorce under some circumstances (Deut. 24), he hates the sinful conditions that produce it. In this text the prophet reaches back beyond the concessions of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 to the creation accounts of

⁴⁰ Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 65. I disagree with Hugenberger's description of Deut 24:1–4's stance towards divorce as “lenient.” While God does grant the allowance of divorce in limited circumstances, the entire textual unit is not a mandate for divorce, but is intended to be a restraint upon frivolous divorce and remarriage. See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:417–18.

Genesis 1–2 and anticipates the teachings of Jesus set forth in Matthew 5:31–32 and 19:4–9.”⁴¹ Walter Kaiser’s comments on Mal 2:16 are also helpful: “Scripture here records one of its strongest protests against divorce, the putting away of wives. In no uncertain terms, God is represented as loathing the practice and the results.”⁴²

I am sympathetic to the confusion many Christians have when they read the recent translations of Mal 2:16. Since California legalized “no-fault” divorce in 1969, marital dissolution has increased exponentially. Combined with the sexual revolution, abortion on demand, and the radical homosexual agenda, we now live in a toxic environment for the family. It is not hard to imagine the consternation of a conservative Christian who purchases a recent translation of the Bible only to discover Scripture’s strongest statement about divorce, Mal 2:16, has been changed! All study Bibles are only intended to give cursory explanations and editorial demands related to space certainly limit the extent of discussion on any text. These constraints noted, the *HCS Study Bible* itself contains several articles that give extended discussion of important issues. Mal 2:16 deserves this type of extended discussion. In its present form, the *HCS Study Bible* oversimplifies the complex debate surrounding Mal 2:16 and can do a better job of explaining the issues. The note sounds defensive and sidesteps crucial issues of genuine disagreement among translators.⁴³ The *HCS Study Bible* would better serve its intended audience by reflecting balance in its study notes on Malachi 2:16.

⁴¹ John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics* (3rd ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 104.

⁴² Walter Kaiser, *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 73. The recent translation owes at least a part of its substrata to the Documentary Hypothesis. I do not mean to infer that all advocates of the recent translation accept the Documentary Hypothesis. On the contrary, I am quite certain that many of them do not. But the supposed contradiction between the common translation of Mal 2:16 and Deut 24:1–4 originally emerged from the theory because a key component of the documentary hypothesis is that Deuteronomy is late, usually dated to the reforms of Josiah. Since Malachi is a post-exilic prophet perhaps around 150 years removed from Josiah’s reforms, then liberal scholarship attributes the very real parallels to Deuteronomy within Malachi to the relative late emergence of Deuteronomistic theology.

⁴³ In contrast, *The ESV Study Bible* provides a more balanced approach and nicely summarizes the ethical implications of both the recent and common translations of Mal 2:16 (Gordon P. Hugenberger, “Study Notes for Malachi,” in *The ESV Study Bible* [ed. Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008], 1776–1777).