

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Christians and Marriage

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

**Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise, doctrine or precept,
whatever it may be; lead us with trembling and with joy into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)**

I find it refreshingly providential that we would have a baby/parental dedication this morning. As these parents dedicated themselves to bringing up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, we are reminded of two important, if fact critical God-given institutions for humanity – that of marriage and of family.

And while we saw these families dedicate themselves to following the Lord, we know that by the instruction of God's Word, no true family begins apart from marriage. Marriage is the essential building block of all families and subsequently then of the very fabric of our communities and culture. In other words, if marriage, as defined and directed by God, is undermined or destroyed, then we should expect to see the unraveling of families, communities, states and nations as these fall into disrepair and ever increasing states of depravity. And while I could chronicle for you the statistics that reveal the truth of this downward spiral of increasing depravity in both this country and around the world, I trust that you are already keenly aware of these facts so that rather than discussing stats, we might discuss Scripture. In fact, that is exactly what this is about – that as our country and humanity moves further away from Scripture, from God's prescription for meaningful life, particularly as it relates to marriage and family, the inevitable result is a culture that is increasingly hostile to God and His people.

Beloved, the institution of marriage as prescribed by God, one man and one woman bound together by covenant, is under siege. Instead of biblical godly marriage being honored, it is being scorned. Marriage is being banalized by pornography, desecrated by fornication and adultery, mocked by homosexuality, sabotaged by unholy co-habitations and civil unions and cut in two by divorce.

And while all this is going on, sadly the Christian community remains by and large passively silent. Perhaps we are afraid of the ridicule that may come if we proclaim God's absolutes. Maybe some are simply embarrassed by their own failings in the area of marriage and sexual purity. But the Bible has something to say about marriage, sex and love and we must not only study it, but we must proclaim it. And remarkably enough, as the author of Hebrews continues his chronicling of the Christian's behavior in light of faith, we find in our text a short but weighty statement and call concerning marriage. So then, let us turn our attention now to Hebrews 13:4 and what it says to us concerning marriage. I would like to cover three things with you from this one verse; first, the consideration of marriage; then the call of marriage; and concluding with the consequences of neglecting marriage (and no, by this I am not calling all singles to get married).

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I. The consideration of marriage

As we first come to our text, I would have us make a right consideration of marriage. By this, I mean that we must consider what God has said to us about marriage. It is interesting to note that there are no verbs in the first two phrases of our verse and so literally reads:

Marriage honorable among all and the bed undefiled...

So, what we have to do is supply the verbs to help us make sense of the verse. But the question is this – do we supply verbs that make this a statement of fact – a declarative truth saying, “Marriage [is] honorable...the marriage bed [is] undefiled”; or do we supply verbs that make this an exhortation, a call or command saying, “Let marriage [be] honored...let the marriage bed [be] undefiled...” To be sure, as most commentators understand it, making this a command easily fits the context of Hebrews 13 because the verses before our text as well as many of them after are exhortations – commands – for we must...

- Love the brethren (philadelphia – verse 1)
- Love strangers (philoxenia – verse 2)
- Love the afflicted (philo-thlipsis – verse 3; Pastor’s coined term)
- Love marriage (phila-gamos – verse 4; Pastor’s coined term); and
- Have no love of money or greed (aphilaguros – verse 5)

But, what if the author intentionally left the verb out so that we might consider this both ways, first, as here in our first point, as a declarative statement, reminding us of how God Himself defines marriage and then as an exhortative statement calling us to a right biblical practice of marriage. In fact, the New King James provides us with this declarative translation of Hebrews 13:4 saying,

Marriage [is] honorable among all, and the bed [is] undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

So let us make this consideration of marriage. What does God say about marriage? Of course this takes us to be beginning, to the book of Genesis 2 – so please turn there. And as you are turning there, let me remind you of this truth. After God creates man and then creates woman (another human being) for man – the very first institution, the very first fellowship, the very first union between any two humans is that of marriage. Before governments, before business partners, before any other kind of relationship between two people, the institution of marriage was ordained by God. How important then is the consideration of marriage, particularly in a culture that has minimized, marginalized and has persistently sought to redefine it according to its own image?

As we come then to the end of Genesis 2, let me set the context. Adam, having been formed as the pinnacle of God’s creative act was given to the task of naming all the animals and through that process Adam realized that there was no help suitable for him – there was no one like him. And so, God determined to create woman to meet Adam’s special need, thus establishing marriage as the foundational institution for all of human society. Let us read beginning in Genesis 2:18; 21-24.

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18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." ...21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said,

*"This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."*

24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

God, in meeting the man's need, took the initiative, created Eve and "brought her to the man." Now don't miss this, for I am sure what I am about to say has either been forgotten or never considered, but Genesis 2:23 is the very first poem of human history. Adam was so exhilarated by Eve that he utters his first words to her (and in praise to God) in poetic verse. This alone points to the unique oneness found in marriage and is confirmed in verse 24 that these two, one man and one woman, shall become one flesh.

Jesus, in Matthew 19:5-6, quotes from this very passage and re-emphasizes the pattern (one man and one woman) as well as the permanence of marriage saying, "**What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.**" And even the Apostle Paul, we speaking of the blessed roles of men and women in marriage in Ephesians appeals to Genesis 2:24.

And so, what is the point? Beloved, marriage is an honorable estate because it has been established, ordained and defined by God. In other words, marriage is honored by God and whatever is honored by God is to be honored by all of God's people. Looking back then to Hebrews 13:4 we have this statement of fact – "**marriage is honorable...**" That word "honorable" or "in honor" is such a beautiful and important word. It is a word that the Apostle Peter uses twice, once in each of his letters. First he uses it in 1 Peter 1:18-19 – let us note there

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious [honorable, dear, valuable] blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Here the word precious [the same word as "honorable" in Hebrews 13:4] is used to describe and define the efficacy and value of the blood of Christ – it is most precious and of greatest value to the believer. Additionally Peter uses it in 2 Peter 1:2-4

3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these [divine power and true knowledge] He has granted to us His precious [honorable, dear, valuable] and magnificent promises, so that by them you

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may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Here the word “honorable” from Hebrews 13:4 is translated as precious to describe and define the promises of God. It is a statement of fact. The promises of God are precious, honorable and dear to the believer. So, as we consider these thoughts in light of Hebrews 13:4 we might rightly say that marriage is precious; it is valuable and therefore absolutely necessary in society to rightly relate to God. I am not saying that everyone must be married to be in right relationship to God, but that marriage, as an institution, is to be regarded as precious, for even as the blood of Christ is precious and the promises of God is precious – the truth of the matter is that marriage, the union of one man to one woman is precious, first to God and therefore to God’s people.

And in like manner the second statement of fact is that if God so honors marriage then it would stand to reason that the marriage bed, a euphemism for the intimacy that husband and wife share together in the act of marriage would be holy, or as our text says, undefiled [*amiantos* – unmixed, unsoiled]. The word “**undefiled**” here is only used four times in the NT (twice in Hebrews 7:26; 13:4; James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:4) and has a high and godly intent. In 1 Peter 1:4, our inheritance, the fullness of the salvation of the believer is said to be undefiled. In James 1:27, the right practice of religion before God is undefiled. And in Hebrews 7:26, Jesus Himself is said to be undefiled. So, what does the word mean – simply this “not corrupted by the world.” Our salvation is not and will not be corrupted or soiled by the world because it is kept in heaven by the power of God. Our practice of religion, of godly practice is said to be undefiled, uncorrupted by the world when we remember orphans and widows as well as when we strive to be holy, to be unstained by the world. In Hebrews 7:26, Jesus, in His ministry as our High Priest, was undefiled, not corrupted by the ways and ideas of the world. And in like manner, God regards the marriage bed as undefiled, that is – it is to be holy, pure and not corrupted by the world and its influence.

II. The call of marriage

Having considered marriage and the marriage bed from its definition as revealed and prescribed by God, let us now consider supplying verbs into our text that make this a call or command. This is what we find supplied by the NASB...

Marriage [is to be held] in honor among all, and the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Or more descriptively we might read it this way:

Let marriage [be held] in honor among all, and let the [marriage] bed [be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

When we read it this way, it is a call, it is a command and expectation that marriage would be practiced and that it would be practiced according to God’s Word. Now, I realize that I am putting the cart before the horse, but let me draw your attention to that little phrase, “**among all.**” This command is universal and comprehensive, meaning that it applies to all

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who would call themselves believers. It is a call to married, to be sure, but it is just as much a call to those who are unmarried believers. Thus far in Hebrews 13:1-4, each of the commands have been universal, applying to everyone and we have no reason to think that this command is any different. So then, what does this mean? Is this verse telling us that everyone should be married? No, it is not, but what it does tell us is this – it is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, each and every one, to know, proclaim and practice the honorability and preciousness of marriage. For just as a husband or wife can dishonor their marriage and defile the marriage bed by ungodly practices, a single person can also dishonor marriage by not knowing or proclaiming what God says about marriage and he can defile the marriage bed by practicing or participating in sexual acts that have been limited to the confines of marriage and the marriage bed. In other words, as we will come to see, it is the responsibility of the entire fellowship, those married, those widowed, those divorced, as well as those who are single to uphold the sanctity of marriage.

Now then, as we consider the call of marriage here as an exhortation, let me simply take these two statements, **“Let marriage be held in honor among all”** and **“let the marriage bed be undefiled”** to speak to two practices we all must pursue and of which I have already alluded.

1. We must rightly perceive marriage

Marriage [is to be held] in honor among all...

As we have already noted, God is the one who ordains and defines marriage. As believers in Jesus Christ then, we must lead the way, not only for other believers, but also for the world, in showing and living out what a biblical marriage is all about. In the early church, and even today, there are two extremes concerning marriage that challenge God’s definition.

The first challenge came in the form of “asceticism” – a self-denial. There were those in the early church, a great many in fact, that considered virginity as necessary to Christian perfection. It would be this idea that would lead to monasticism and the practice of celibacy among the priesthood of the Catholic Church as the teaching was that those who choose marriage choose inferior spirituality. But, as we saw, God honors marriage, so such a view dishonors what God says about marriage. There were some in this Hebrew church that would have had this view.

The second challenge to both the early church and obviously to the church today is that of libertinism – “a self-indulgence” - the idea of unbridled liberty when it comes to area of relationships and sexuality. Thus, the idea and limitations of marriage were either modified away from God’s standards or mocked and disregarded altogether. Obviously, in this way, marriage is dishonored, as people, even those in the church, see marriage as nothing more than a provisional arrangement between two people, regardless of sexual orientation. Such an arrangement can be dissolved at any time and for any reason. Now, that is the extreme to be sure, but even among those of us more conventional types, rather than upholding and proclaiming the preciousness of marriage, we often allow a skepticism concerning love and marriage to linger and grow, a skepticism that has been sarcastically encapsulated in the statement: “Love, temporary insanity curable by marriage” as if to suggest that love and marriage are somehow at odds with one another. Beloved, they are not – they should not be and we are called here to oppose anything that opposes the honorability of marriage. “Let

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marriage be precious to all of you” so says the author. Believers must celebrate marriage. And this leads us to the second practice...

2. *We must rightly protect marriage* **the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled**

In addition to not despising marriage, the actual act of marriage, that is, our very attitudes toward sexual activity are to be governed by and included only in the confines of marriage. Every believer then is to protect, or guard the marriage bed. We are to protect against the corrupting influences of the world that would rob the marriage bed of its God-given place as the only godly place of sexual activity. Every believer, married or unmarried, is to regard marriage as so precious that we want it protected from any pollution, stain or perversity. This means that infidelity in marriage or premarital sexual activity; it means homosexuality or any such perversion of God’s revealed word is guarded against so that the purity of marriage is upheld.

We must resist the temptations of this world to dishonor marriage. Some things have not changed as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and many other places in the first century were bastions of sexual promiscuity and the people there often mocked monogamous relationships with contempt. As sinners became believers in these communities, it was not understood how Christians would or even could take such strong stances concerning marriage. But here lies an important point of testimony. For it has been noted that the sexual morality not immorality, but the sexual morality of the early believers was so unique and so steadfast that the pagan world looked upon it with great wonder. How important is it for us today to proclaim and uphold the honorability of marriage in a culture that values just about anything immoral, considering adultery irrelevant, sexual purity as abnormal, sex as a right (with whomever and however it may be obtained) and has invented the egregious term “recreational sex?” For the believer, the realm of sex is the marriage bed – that is why it is to be protected and that is why it is to be honored. In the Bible, sex is celebrated only in marriage.

III. **The consequences of the neglect of marriage** **...for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

I honestly can’t tell you why the author of Hebrews did not supply the verbs for the first part of this verse. I have therefore given you a couple of ways to legitimately look at it. With that said however, please note that we do have a verb for the last part of this verse; namely that God will judge fornicators and adulterers. The verb “**will judge**” is a statement of fact. God will actively and surely judge; or condemn, damn and avenge anyone who practices the neglect and honoring of marriage.

Why is it that God will be so wrathful against those who neglect marriage? Why, as we see in Romans 1, is God so disagreeable with the legitimizing of gay and lesbian relationships and “civil unions”? Why is it that to disagree with our culture’s definition of marriage brings cries of bigotry and homophobia? John Piper answer the question well when he said,

“God’s judgment on homosexual and lesbian relationships is not because He is a killjoy, but because He is opposed to what kills joy. And [believers’] opposition to such partnerships is not because of some knee-jerk homophobia, as they say again and again, but because of a settled

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and reasonable conviction that God knows better than anybody what is good for us and for society.”

There is a sense in which the great consequence for neglecting the honoring of marriage is simply the loss of joy that is found only in doing things God’s way.

And just to who then is this judgment for the dishonoring of marriage directed? Two simple words here in our text: fornicators and adulterers. Beloved, these two words are comprehensive and all-encompassing. The word **“fornicators”** is from the Greek *pornous* from which we get our word “pornography.” It simply means “immoral” – against morals, specifically the sexual morals prescribed by God. It has come to speak of the persons who indulge themselves in any kind of sexual activity outside the marriage bed, be it heterosexual or homosexual.

Additionally, there are **“adulterers”** – which speaks of those who are unfaithful to the commitments and bonds of their marriage bonds. So then, simply stated, when these two adjectives are put together as they are in our text, they are meant to cover every conceivable type of immoral behavior or practice by either those who are unmarried or by those who are married.

Beloved, I speak to the entire congregation – we must love the God-given institution of marriage. We must uphold it according to God’s word. We must celebrate it. We are called to count it precious, even we consider the blood of Christ and the promises of God precious. We must all be diligent to guard our own lives from sexual immorality in all its forms. And the reasons are clear.

First, the testimony of the gospel is at stake among believers. What we say about marriage in both word and action speaks to our convictions concerning God and His Word as well as to the transforming power of Jesus Christ to take a sinful, selfish heart and make that heart long to love God and to love the things of God.

Second, we need to remember the judgment that belongs to those who dishonor marriage, in whatever forms, remembering as Hebrews 10:31 says, “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Let us all therefore honor marriage and let us all keep the marriage bed undefiled. For godly marriages testify of the grace of God and His working in us. Let us therefore guard the honor of marriage by keeping it according to the Word of God and asking ourselves if we are doing anything in our own lives that might be undermining or dishonoring this first and most precious gift given to humanity. Let us repent of any such thing and proclaim the greatness of this gift to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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January 27, 2008