

Marital Fidelity for Pilgrims

Hebrews 13:4

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Introduction:

Hebrews was written under the inspiration of God to Jewish believers a little over halfway into the first century—maybe in the early 60s.

- The author himself calls it “an exhortation in few words.”
- Primarily, it is an exhortation to continue clinging to Jesus Christ and to break away from way of worship that God appointed until the coming of Christ under the Old Covenant.
- Now that Jesus has come, the age of priests, altars, temples, and ceremonial washings apart from one baptism are all replaced by the proclamation and celebration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His saving work that brings us to God the Father.

In chapters 12 & 13, our lives as Christians are described as running a race of endurance, looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith who brings us to His Father’s house in glory where He has prepared a place for us.

- We have used Psalm 84 to sing of the delightful prospect of living in our Father’s house.
- We look to Jesus as the one who opened the way for us to get there by His suffering and death, as the one who shows us how to faithfully endure in the way, and as the one who, as we look to Him, enables and strengthens us to continue in the way.
 - The way is difficult because it involves hardships and opposition and includes chastisement to address the sin that remains in us. By Jesus, it is pardoned, but He is also removing it which can be a painful process.
- We do not go alone, but as members of the church that He has redeemed.
 - We stand together as brothers in a common cause in a world that often opposes us.

In chapter 13, we are instructed about how we are to conduct ourselves as brothers who are together on the road to our Father’s house in glory.

- The foundational exhortation is that we are to **let brotherly love continue**.
 - We have to be attentive to this.
 - If we do nothing, our love will grow cold.
- So far, we have been reminded more specifically to remember to entertain strangers—reaching out to brothers among us that we do not know (I fear that too many of us are strangers) and to minister to those who are persecuted.
 - Today we come to a third particular aspect of “letting brotherly love continue” that is rather different than the first two.

Give attention and I will read it to you. It is Hebrews 13:4.

- Here it is. Hebrews 13:4. The word of God:

Heb 13:4: Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Thus far the reading of God's word.

The overall idea here is pretty clear.

- As pilgrims going to God's house in glory, we need to have a high regard for marriage and sexual purity (the bed undefiled).
 - This is something that stands out among the true disciples of Christ.
- That is clearly the overall meaning of the text.
 - It is not clear if it should be interpreted as a command: "Let marriage be honoured," or a statement: "Marriage is honourable," but since it is impossible to have one without the other, it makes little difference.
 - If God declares it to be honourable, we should honour it.
 - If God commands us to honour it, it certainly means that it is indeed honourable.

In opening this subject further, we will look at four matters:

- That dishonouring marriage has been a huge problem through the ages.
- Reasons to honour marriage.
- The severe consequences of dishonouring it.
- How you can go about honouring it.

Let's get started.

I. Dishonouring marriage has been a major problem through the ages.

A. This was certainly the case with the Jews in the first century. Dr. Robert Martin identifies several issues among them.

1. Some regarded all sexual activity, including in marriage, to be unclean and committed themselves to singleness.
2. Others saw it as a hinderance to the contemplative life or to serving God with undivided attention.
3. The Essenes abstained from it as part of the discipline of soldiers preparing for an imminent holy war against the enemies of God.
4. Others did not condemn marriage, but regarded celibacy as a more sanctified life.
5. At the opposite side, there were those who saw nothing wrong with fornication (sex outside of marriage) as long as you did not violate a formal marriage contract or break any vows.
6. And of course we are quite familiar with the Jews Jesus confronted who taught easy divorce.

➤ As you can see, our author had good reasons to address his audience about honouring marriage.

B. But marriage has, in fact, been dishonoured in almost every age.

1. There was a strong influence in the early church by the Greeks who held that spirit was pure and matter was corrupt—and so saw abstinence as a higher way of living.
2. This led to an inappropriate esteem of the unmarried state, and eventually to the prohibition of marriage to the clergy and to serious Christians.

3. At the same time, every age has seen many who see little that is wrong with fornication or even adultery.

C. In our day, marriage is definitely not held in honour.

1. Our society is more and more filled with almost every form of sexual immorality and perversion.
 - There is acceptance of sodomy and the invention of so-called gay marriage—and even the promotion of such practices as good and wholesome.
 - There is the endorsement of perverted forms of sex in marriage.
 - And sex outside of marriage is becoming more and more widespread.
 - Pornography is widely used.
 - Even things like sex with minors are starting to gain acceptance.
2. Besides that, marriage itself is mocked, disparaged. Those contemplating it are warned against it and pitied.
 - One of the reasons for this is because marriage is lived in so badly.
 - Easy, no-fault divorce is prevalent and approved of in society, even if it is just that the couple got tired of each other and agreed to move on.
3. Perhaps the worst thing is that all of these corruptions are increasing in the church and even gaining acceptance at an alarming rate.
 - There are only a very few churches that will exercise church discipline even for adultery, homosexuality, couples cohabitating without marriage, or divorce without legitimate grounds.

D. In seeing all of this, we must never be proud, but rather humbled and broken.

1. The church is not just our congregation.
 - We see the prophets and our Lord Jesus lamenting the state of the church and their society.
 - Even if we are living in chastity ourselves—which we certainly ought to do—we bear the shame and should cry to God for mercy to our nation and to the church in our nation.
2. Besides that, we know that we can look much too fondly on some of these sins and sometimes fall into them at least on the heart level if not beyond.
 - And if we consider how we are living in our own marriages, we see that we have not honoured God's institution the way we should.

II. Let's turn now to consider reasons to hold marriage in honour.

- Perhaps this will help you to esteem marriage more highly than you do.

A. First, marriage is honourable because it is God's institution.

1. To disparage marriage is to disparage Him!
 - He established this institution for us and we say, "What is this that you have done?" It is to take God's holy name in vain—to count Him as less than God!
2. He instituted marriage before the fall—for us to fully enjoy and practice when we were pure and without sin.
 - It was not a concession because of our weakness.

- It was the gracious holy gift of our Creator to those who were made in His image—something that pertains to us alone—not to angels or animals.
- B. Second, is honourable because our gracious heavenly Father designed it for our happiness.
1. He is the one who appointed that there should be lifelong companionship in marriage with growing mutual love and service.
 - A good marriage is where we escape loneliness.
 - How we ought to pray for those who do not have this blessing and would like to have it—but how we ought to cherish it and improve it if we do have it.
 2. He is the one who came up with such a thing as sexual relations.
 - He made these relations to be delightful.
 - He might have designed it so that we were one gender and that we reproduce by burying our fingernails in the soil.
- C. Third, marriage is honourable because it is so beneficial to the man and woman.
1. Marriage is the place where we experience the highest expressions of human love.
 - It is here that there is the greatest knowledge of another person as a person—with real feelings that we must regard and insights that we gain and talents that we benefit from.
 - It is here that by God’s grace the deepest devotion and the most sacrificial service can be given and received.
 - And because we are sinners, it is here that we learn to repent and to forgive, to bear patiently, to give and receive correction and counsel.
 2. It is in marriage that we have to learn to draw upon God that we might live faithfully in it.
 - It is a nursery in which love, devotion, and service are developed to enable us to exercise them in the community and in the world at large.
 - We learn how to live in “the one and the many.”
- D. Fourth, marriage is honourable because it is so beneficial to the whole society.
1. John Brown wrote, “A family is the elementary form of human society, the germ of nations and churches; and the relation in which families originate is the foundation of all human relations. The institution which forms that relation must of course be of peculiar importance. That institution is of direct divine appointment and is nearly coeval with the existence of the human race. In its primitive and only legitimate form, it is the union of one man and one woman for life; and just in proportion as it has preserved this form, has it served its purpose, in distinguishing man from the brute creation, in excluding disorders of licentiousness, and in cultivating the best affections of the heart.”
 2. John Owen said, “Whatever there is of virtue, honour, order, or comeliness among men—whatever is praiseworthy and useful in all societies, economical, ecclesiastical, or political, depend on this institution; and that by all to whom children are dear, relations useful, and inheritances valuable, marriage should be accounted honourable.”

3. We are increasingly seeing the destruction and disorder that comes to a society that attacks the family as we are doing.
- E. Fifth, marriage is honourable because God designed it to be a way for us to display the relationship of Christ to His bride, the church.
1. In the Song of Solomon, we have marriage introduced as a picture of Christ and His bride, the church.
 - After that, the church is referred to as the wife of Jesus again and again. Even at the end, as shown in Revelation 21, she appears as a bride adorned for her husband.
 2. In Ephesians 5:22-27, it says: **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.**
 3. What an honour it bestows on marriage for it to be a pattern of the most grand and sacred relationship of all—that of Christ and His church!
 - Marriage teaches us about and enriches our relationship with Christ, and our relationship with Christ enriches and teaches about our marriages.

TRANS> Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled. We have much reason to hold it in the highest honour.

- Now let's turn to look at:

III. The severe consequences of dishonouring marriage.

- Our text is very clear: **“Fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”**
 - For some reason, professing believers are often deceived into supposing that they can live in these sins without consequences.
 - This is not so.
 - Oddly, people think this even though this sin has many short-term consequences that ought to show us that God is displeased with it.
- A. Fornication and adultery are both sins that have many consequences in this life.
1. Prov 6:26 says: **And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.**
 - The word translated life is *nephesh* which means *soul*.
 - Sexual sins eat away at your soul so that you less and less able to love, to be convicted of sin, to care about others, to enjoy things—even to enjoy sex.
 2. Prov 6:26 also says: **For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread;**
 - Prov 5:6 speaks of how aliens become filled with your wealth.
 - There are so many ways that it impoverishes a person.
 - Much money is spent on pornography and prostitutes. 35% of downloads are pornography.
 - But besides that, broken marriages generate lawyer fees and alimony payments.
 3. These sins destroy the special place that the LORD has given to sexual relations.
 - Sex has a beautiful and special place, but it is profaned and becomes common when it is not kept in the bounds that God appointed for it.

- Those who engage in promiscuity are to be pitied.
- Proverbs 5 speaks of how a man does not know the way of the harlot. She looks like something sweet and smooth, but it is his deceitful lusts that see that. Her end is as bitter as wormwood.
 - I remember speaking to miserable old man whose father ran a strip club. The man said that for him seeing a naked woman was like seeing a wall.
- 4. Proverbs 5:11 speaks of mourning at last when your flesh and body are consumed.
 - God has special judgments in our bodies because of these sins—all kinds of sexually transmitted diseases—
- 5. Dishonouring marriage is harmful to children.
 - In Mal 2:13-16, God says He hates divorce because He wants godly offspring.
 - God designed it that children would grow up with a father and mother who exhibit love, faithfulness, companionship, self-sacrifice, commitment to work through problems, and so forth.
 - It is very disruptive to a child to have the relationship dissolved before their eyes.
- 6. The promiscuous lifestyle often produces loneliness too.
 - Rather than having a life-long companion, you end up with relationships that never have an opportunity to mature with age like a fine wine.
 - Promiscuous women will have lots of attention in their 20s and 30s, both from men their own age as well as older, more established men.
 - But when they get in their 40s and 50s, they are often sidelined and lonely.
- 7. But there is something else that should be more troubling to us than all of these things.
 - Sexual immorality displeases our heavenly Father and destroys our communion with Him. In Gen 39:9, Joseph said, when tempted by an immoral woman, **“How can I do this great sin against God?”**
 - The sad reality is many professing Christians do not know what it is to have communion with God—to hear His voice and delight in His love—to walk in fellowship with Him and in the assurance of His love.
 - They don’t know what is to sin away their fellowship with Him because they are not walking in fellowship with Him.
 - Is that the case with you? Get on your knees and plead with Him!

➤ Those are some of the consequences in this life.

B. But even more concerning is the eternal wrath and judgment of God in hell.

1. Repeatedly, the Bible tells people not to be deceived into thinking a person who lives an immoral lifestyle can be right with God apart from repentance.
 - For example, 1 Cor 6:9 says: **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites...**
 - Other sins are added as well, but these sins of sexual immorality that many think are acceptable are in fact not at all acceptable.
 - Likewise, Ephesians 5:5 says: **For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**
 - More examples could be given.

2. Surely, this ought to remind us that our God is a holy God.
 - As we saw in Hebrews 12, **Our God is a consuming fire.**
 - Those who come to Christ in the right way come to have fellowship with God who is light. They cannot live in defiance of Him without repenting.
 - They may fall into sin like David did, but they will not go on without repentance. They will repent and turn to Christ for cleansing.

TRANS> Now we are ready for the last thing I wanted to consider.

IV. How can you honour marriage?

- A. First, ask God to shine His light upon you.
 - To show you His glory and the glory of marriage that He instituted.
 - Ask Him to open the eyes of your understanding to see the sin and evil of immorality—and of profaning His institution.
 - Ask Him to convict you of your sin—to expose it and show you its true nature.
 - Then confess your sin to Him and seek His mercy through Christ crucified.
 - The Bible assures us that He can save us from these sins.
 - Not only does He pardon you, He will also transform you to live a life that is more and more pure and holy and conformed to His ways.
- B. Then, with a humble attitude keep watch over your heart, your body, and your tongue.
 1. Sexual immorality begins at the heart level.
 - Ask the Lord to keep you from temptation and preserve you.
 - Ask Him to help you maintain pure and holy thoughts and desires about marriage and the marriage bed, and to live in chastity.
 - Ask Him to help you, if you should have opportunity to marry, to do so with a holy joy and proper attitude about your marriage.
 2. Guard the way you talk about marriage and the marriage bed.
 - Don't join the world in their disparaging talk about marriage.
 - Tell your children and your friends of the how valuable and important it is.
 - Oppose measures in the society that denigrate the family. They are diabolical.
 - Speak about the holiness and goodness of sex in its proper place.
 - Speak about the evils of sexual immorality—how it is both wrong and harmful.
 - Do not join in lewd talk and course jesting. These are not appropriate for believers.
- C. Live in marriage or in relation to marriage in a way that honours it.
 - Abstain from sexual immorality until you marry—as scripture says—
 - 1 Cor 6:18: **Flee from sexual immorality.**
 - Encourage others to do the same, and follow the process in Matthew 18 to call those who practice immorality to repentance—it is the loving thing to do so that they will not be deceived even though you may be called evil for doing it.
 - And if you are married, see that by God's grace you do not tear down your relationship, but that you do all that you can to strengthen it—and to delight in it.
 - Be a devoted and delightful wife to your husband—honouring him as your head.

- And be a devoted and faithful husband, understanding your wife, cherishing her, laying down your life for her, and leading your home in godliness.
- Give thanks for your spouse and give thanks for marriage, and pray earnestly that you will bring honour to it for the glory of your heavenly Father and His Son.
- Ask Him and consciously set out to display in your marriage a model of the relationship of Christ and His church.
 - Pray that the beauty of the Lord will be upon you and your marriage, and that it will be full of the sweet, sweet savour of Christ.

D. Pray that marriage will be held in honour by your friends, in your church, in our nation, and in the whole world.

Hebrews 13:4: Marriage is honourable among all and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers, God will judge. Amen.