

Text: Hebrews 13:4

Title: Upholding the Holiness of Marriage

Truth: We must maintain the purity of marriage lest we fall into judgment.

Date/Location: Sunday January 22, 2012 at FBC

Sidebar

Today is sanctity of human life Sunday, a day on which those who love life around the USA especially remember the tragic Supreme Court decision of Roe v. Wade in 1973. Al Mohler reports on the staggering situation:

“Abortion is now America’s most common surgical procedure performed on adults. As many as one out of three women will have at least one abortion. In some American neighborhoods, the number of abortions far exceeds the number of live births. Most Americans will pay little attention to the 38th anniversary of the infamous Roe v. Wade decision. In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that a woman has a constitutional right to arrange the killing of the unborn life within her. Since that decision was handed down, more than 50 million babies have been aborted, at a rate of over 3,000 each day.” [www.albertmohler.com]

We could adapt our text from Hebrews this morning and it would be just as true: “Life must be held in honor by all, and abortion must be stopped, for God will judge murderers and their accomplices.”

Introduction

The reason we have a problem with abortion in our nation is that people cannot control their sexual desires and activity. In short, they do not follow the admonition of purity in marriage found in this text.

Diagram

Marriage must be held in honor
by all
and
the marriage bed must be kept pure
[by all]
for God will judge
fornicators
and adulterers.

I. The Institution of Marriage Must be Honored

A. This is an imperative.

1. If v. 4 were a statement, it would be against ascetics, who suggest that marriage is something bad.

i. Note 1 Tim 4:1-3 and God’s approval of marriage

ii. Popular interpretations of Song of Solomon gut the text of its marital significance by trying to make it a picture of Christ's love for the church. But there is nothing wrong with marriage. We should not just ban the whole idea!

2. It is more feasible to consider v. 4 as a two-fold command to HONOR marriage and to KEEP IT PURE.

i. The tenor of the passage is a command instead of a statement of fact. See v. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9.

ii. There is no verb (be or let be), so we need the help of context to determine the sense of the passage.

iii. The same exact grammatical construction occurs in verse 5 (adjective-article-noun = honorable the marriage = without covetousness the conduct). Verse clearly has an exhortation flavor.

iv. The simple fact is that not all people do honor marriage or keep it pure. Married people secretly and even openly cheat; some people denounce marriage as unspiritual; some want to redefine it; multitudes are divorcing; and the secular media glorifies the dishonor and defilement of marriage. Marriage is abused by its practitioners and is viciously attacked by those who oppose it.

B. The idea is that people are to regard marriage as something that is precious and valuable and are to have respect for it. Marriage has exceptional value and must be treated as such. For one thing, it came from God. It is a good created by God and must not be treated as unholy or carnal. The Bible exhorts the enjoyment of marriage as a good gift from God, and we should take that at face value! This good gift is to be maintained.

C. Marriage is to be esteemed highly, and it is to be held in that way BY US AND EVERYONE ELSE.

1. Believers and unbelievers are included. You might temporarily be tripped up and think that this is a command for believers since the book is written to mostly professing Hebrew Christians.

2. However, the text does say "by all" and that leaves open the question "all of you" or "all of everyone?" I take it that the foundational nature of marriage to God's creation and to society means that the moral obligation rests upon every person, not just Christians. In fact, judgment will be meted out to those who violate the command (see the second half of the verse).

II. The Practice of Marriage Must be Pure

A. The marriage bed is to be kept undefiled, in the sense of morally pure. Jesus Christ is pure (Hebrews 7:26); our salvation inheritance is pure (1 Peter 1:4).

B. This is wide-ranging command: excluded is any violation of marital intimacy and your promise to keep yourself only for your spouse, any abuse of marriage, any importing of outside stuff into it, etc.

C. This means purity within/during marriage, *and* before marriage. Any sexual activity outside of the bounds of the union of one man and one woman is strictly forbidden by God.

1. Polygamy is not pure. Open marriage is not pure. Adultery is not pure. Pre-marital sex is not pure. Homosexuality is not pure.
2. Divorce is not pure but multitudes are doing it. Notice the teaching of Scripture on this subject is very clear. Matthew 19:1-10 is an example:
 - i. It is not right to “divorce your spouse for any reason.”
 - ii. What God joins together, man must not separate.
 - iii. Divorce was allowed in the Old Testament because of the hardness of people’s hearts, as a way to regulate sin and prevent total breakdown of the society.
 - iv. Any divorce followed by remarriage is the result of or results in adultery. Notice the two cases the Lord gives. (1) Divorce caused by previous sexual immorality. That is adultery. (2) Divorce not caused by previous sexual immorality. The Lord teaches that the divorced man commits adultery if he marries another woman, and the woman who is remarried also is guilty of adultery. A lot more can be said about this, but I hope this is enough to shock our systems so we are sure to know that divorce is all about sin. It is not a righteous thing. “The holy state of divorce” is not something you can say.

III. Marriage is Honorable and Pure

A. All of this means that the estate of matrimony is an honorable thing. It is a good from God, part of His “very good” creation in Genesis 1-2. Its pleasures and production of offspring are good things not to be looked down upon. Guilt *should* be experienced when its purity is violated, but when its purity is enjoyed, there is no guilt. Contrary to ascetics who forbid marriage for certain classes of people (monks, nuns, priests, etc.) godly men and women are and generally should be married.

B. Both the public and private aspects of marriage are included in this verse. “Marriage” includes the state of being married and the institution of marriage on a societal level. The “marriage bed” is the private aspect of marriage. Both individual and society are commanded to keep marriage pure and undefiled, in its practice and institution. Society should uphold marriage and its practice by the establishment and enforcement of laws that reflect the honor and purity that marriage should have, as prescribed in the Bible

IV. God Will Judge Violators of Marriage

A. The main point of the second half of the verse is that God will judge those who violate the honor and purity of marriage. Neither fornicators nor adulterers uphold marriage as it should be. By their practice they degrade it and defile it and trample upon it.

1. Fornication is the pre-marital sully of the purity of marriage. Things you do before your marriage break this command by defiling the institution of marriage and in fact can dirty your marriage later. Things you do, think about, let your eyes see, lusts you coddle, etc. can all have a negative effect. Singles, consider the command to keep marriage pure.
 2. Adultery is a post-marital sully of the purity of marriage. The same kinds of things said above apply. Married folks, make sure to remember the command to keep marriage pure.
- B. Both behaviors (before/after marriage) are condemned by God. Some may try to keep these acts secret, but such sin faces consequences either now and/or later. Nothing is hidden from God.
1. Why judgment? God's righteous character demands judgment against sin because of its inherent demerit and its offensive nature.
 2. Who? For believers, the Bible says that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1). So if a Christian has committed adultery or fornication before, but repented of it, this sin is forgiven and its eternal consequences are paid for by Christ. There will almost invariably still be temporal consequences, however (more on that in a second).
 3. Who? Unbelievers are the main point of this verse. Those who are habitual fornicators or adulterers are *not* Christian people. They do not have the Spirit of God guiding them nor are they constrained by His morality. 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Ephesians 5:3-6 make it quite clear that these folks have no part in God's kingdom. Unbelievers can face temporal consequences and they will certainly also face eternal judgment for their sin.
 4. How? God could arrange special circumstances that have the effect of punishing us. Often, however, God allows the natural consequences to take over. King David experienced some serious consequences for his sin (2 Samuel 12:10-11).
- C. It is important to reiterate this truth in your mind. God WILL JUDGE those who violate the purity of marriage. There is no question about that. Somehow, sometime it will come. This offers a strong motivation for all people to avoid the violation of marital purity.

Conclusion

We have gone over the facts of what God has said in Hebrews 13:4. It should be obvious that He wants us to be righteous with respect to our marital situation. This runs counter to the world, the devil, and the lusts of our own flesh. But if we give in to those influences, we will face God's judgment.

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