

Guarding the Honor of Marriage, Part 1 (Hebrews 13:4)

And will you now please turn to Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews chapter 13. We're going to begin reading at chapter 12, verse 28, and we'll read through the end of verse 6 in chapter 13. Beginning in chapter 12, verse 28:

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.

2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

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.

5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

6 so that we may confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Heb. 12:28–13:6 NASB)

Marriage is what brings us together today. I have always wanted to say that at the beginning of a wedding that I have officiated. I've never had the courage to do it, though I probably would have come closest at one of the weddings that I officiated for one of my children. If I'm ever diagnosed with cancer and I know I've got one wedding ceremony left to do and I'm given the opportunity to do it, that's how I'm going to begin.

But I can say that today at the beginning of our service because that is the subject matter that we are dealing with here in 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

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will judge.” This is the next in a series of exhortations and applications that are found here in this thirteenth chapter of Hebrews. As the author concludes this book, he is concerned to press home to us some of the essential applications of biblical truth that he has spent twelve chapters unfolding. For us it feels like twelve years, but for them it was just twelve chapters. This is part of running the race that is set before us. We are exhorted and encouraged as kingdom citizens to fix our hope on the finish line and to run the race that is set before us so that we may receive the prize. This is what running the race looks like. It looks like obeying these commands.

Now there's just one sentence here on the subject of marriage in verse 4, and there's no detailed explanation. There's no long exposition or theological treatment of the significance of marriage. We have here just one command to honor marriage and to protect the marriage bed. And at first glance it seems as if this exhortation is sort of out of place. It's a little bit odd. It doesn't seem like it belongs in the overall theology of the book of Hebrews.

We might expect a statement like this in the passage where Paul deals with the subject of marriage in Ephesians 5, like we've been handling in adult Sunday school class the last number of weeks. Paul there gives a detailed explanation of the roles in marriage and the theological significance behind marriage. Or we might expect a statement like this to appear in 1 Peter 3, where the apostle Peter deals with godly living in a hostile world and what that looks like even in the home. And there he deals with the subject of believing women who have unbelieving husbands whom Peter says are disobedient to the Word. And he talks there about the conduct for both men and women in fulfilling their roles in the relationship within the home.

But here is this command regarding marriage in a context where we do not readily expect it. Hebrews is a book that compares Jesus with all the functions and features of the old covenant. It is a book intended to show that Jesus is greater than the angels, He's greater than Moses, He's greater than Aaron, He is greater than the Old Testament priesthood, He's greater than all of the sacrifices. In fact, name your Old Testament hero—Jesus surpasses them all. And not only that, but His life is greater than all of their lives, His sacrifice greater than all Old Testament sacrifices, His work and ministry greater than all Old Testament works and ministries. It is intended to compare Christ with all of those things—Aaron, Melchizedek, their works, their priesthood, everything from the Old Testament. And the theme of all of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is greater than all of that.

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So where does marriage and moral purity and guarding the marriage bed—where does that fit into the book of Hebrews? For instance, back in chapter 7 when we were looking at the passage that compares the Melchizedekian priesthood with the priesthood of Jesus and the Aaronic priesthood—we're looking at that passage, and we saw how Levi was in the loins of Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, and therefore Levi was paying tithes to Melchizedek, and therefore Melchizedek is greater than Levi. And if Melchizedek is greater than Levi, then the priesthood that Melchizedek had, which is without beginning and without end, is greater than the priesthood that Levi was given and therefore his sons and therefore Aaron. It's greater than all of that. How many of you when we went through chapter 7 were thinking to yourself, "I bet that there's a verse on the purity of the marriage bed and honoring marriage somewhere in this Epistle." Just seems out of place, doesn't it?

Or when we're in chapter 8 and we're dealing with the new covenant and the glories of the new covenant and how it surpasses the old covenant and we got that exposition of Jeremiah 31 and the explanation of how the Old Testament was nothing but shadows and symbols and the New Testament is the fulfillment of all of that and the greater covenant, were any of you thinking to yourself, "This would be the perfect place to work in a verse on honoring marriage and the marriage bed"? Any of you thought that? Some of you are thinking, "That was so long ago, I don't even remember what I was thinking back when we covered that."

Or how many of you when we were in chapter 9 looking at the tabernacle and the furniture and the day of atonement and the sprinkling of blood on the altar once a year behind the veil and comparing that to the work of Jesus in offering one sacrifice for sins and then forever sitting down at the right hand of the Father, how many of you thought to yourself, "I think that honoring marriage and the marriage bed is the perfect application of this truth"? In fact, if you go back and you listen to some of those messages, you'll probably not hear me draw that application at all in any of that.

So what does marriage and honoring marriage and the marriage bed have to do with the book of Hebrews? Let's consider it from a bit of a different angle. Consider this. The glorious Messiah who was promised and pictured for the entire Old Testament dispensation has now come to accomplish the ultimate work to redeem a people for His own possession. He has offered one sacrifice for sin and has sat down at the Father's right hand where He currently makes intercession for those whom the Father has given to Him so that He might save them and secure them and sanctify them everlastingly.

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And those people whom the Father has given to Him, whom the Son has then redeemed and purchased by His own blood, He has done this because they are His people. And He even now makes intercession for them to apply the merits of His life and His sacrifice to their account so that there is no condemnation to those who are in Him. And they are promised only glory, only joy, only reward. And He has made them His own, and as His people, we are called out of this world and into an eternal kingdom. And He has given us this kingdom. It is ours. And even now He sits beyond the veil, as it were, in Heaven, praying for us, encouraging us to run our race. And then He does everything in His power to secure the finishing of that race on our behalf for us. And He sustains us through that. Having purchased us, He sustains us and keeps us, and He has secured us and will bring us past that finish line to Himself as His own people, a blood-bought and redeemed people zealous for good works. That is what He has done.

Now since He has done that, how ought holy people to live? Well they should, in verse 1, love one another. They should, in verse 2, love the stranger. They should, in verse 3, love the prisoner. And they should, in verse 4, love their spouse. See, it just seems natural now, doesn't it? You say, "How come I never even saw this back in the first twelve chapters of the book? It seems like such a natural way of applying all of that biblical truth."

And here in this context, what he is saying is that the salvation that is described in the first twelve chapters of this book will be seen in the lives and the behavior and the conduct of those who have been so purchased. It will be seen. The redemption will result in a certain kind of marriage. This redemption will result in a pure and holy sexual ethic. And if your Christianity does not affect your marriage and your marriage bed, you are living a lie. That is the straightforward point. You're living a lie. You are at best a hypocrite. That is the best thing you can say. At worst, you may in fact be a self-deceived apostate in the making. If your Christianity does not affect your marriage and your marriage bed, you're either a hypocrite or you are a self-deceived apostate in the making.

You know what inevitably goes with apostasy, nearly every time we see it? Sexual immorality. So it seems quite reasonable that in the context of a book that is encouraging us to persevere in the faith that we would get some moral instruction regarding moral purity and honoring our marriage. It is almost as certain as the wetness of water and almost without fail that when people walk away from the faith and they

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depart from Christianity, it is because they are enslaved to certain craven lusts and sexual desires. Almost 100 percent of the time.

The apostate cannot square their lusts and their desires with the moral demands of the new covenant and with the moral demands of the New Testament, and so first the apostate begins to make excuses for their sin. Then the apostate begins to redefine their sin. And then finally, the apostate just gives up all pretense and abandons any standard by which their sin might be called sin and by which they might be held to account. And then they begin to just simply deconstruct their faith. And they end up leaving the faith. Nearly 100 percent of the time, apostasy is motivated by sexual immorality and the desire to fulfill craven sexual lusts.

We've seen this within our own body even within the last year, have we not? And we should not forget that because it is a cautionary tale. Now I say "almost all the time" and I don't say "100 percent of the time" because there may be some instance out there where somebody who's listening to me could point to where an apostate was motivated by something other than their sexual immorality. So there might be an example of that. I have not seen an example of that. If I ever see an example of that, I will let you know. But so far every example that I have seen of any kind of high-profile apostasy or apostasy within a church body that I've been present in, it is always accompanied by craven sexual desires and desires of immorality. They either want what they cannot have or they want to affirm something that God condemns. Apostasy and sexual immorality go together like peanut butter and chocolate. They are always there, or *should* at least always be there—but peanut butter and chocolate I'm speaking of.

Apostasy is motivated by sexual immorality. This is why Joshua Harris, within a year after his public deconstruction and apostasy—this is why Joshua Harris, within a year, divorced his wife and was marching in a gay pride parade inside of Vancouver, British Columbia. It happens all the time. So therefore, in the context of a book that gives us encouragement to persevere in the faith, we have this moral instruction in verse 4. Just as false teachers follow their sensuality (2 Peter 2:2), so the apostate remains a slave to sin. Listen to how Peter describes apostates and false teachers. 2 Peter 2:18–20:

18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,

19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

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20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (NASB)

Marriage is to be honored and the marriage bed is to be kept pure from defilement because of our covenant that we have made with our spouse, and marriage is in this way a protection from sexual immorality. And moral purity is itself a speed bump to or a protection against apostasy because the one who has committed himself to honoring and living out a holy life in fidelity and faithfulness to their spouse with whom they are in covenant and keeping their marriage bed pure from all enemies—foreign (outside enemies) and domestic (the ones inside of our hearts)—when they're committed to guarding that, that in itself is a guard against apostasy, a prevention of apostasy. So in this book we are talking about persevering in marriage. And if you are going to address an apostate, you might as well deal with the subject of marriage, honoring marriage, and being faithful inside of that marriage covenant.

So there are two things here that we are to honor in verse 4: marriage and the marriage bed. And the reason that these are to be honored, both of them are to be honored, is at the end of verse 4: “For fornicators [that is, the immoral people] and adulterers God will judge.” And we should just let that hang there for as long as it needs to hang there. Fornicators and adulterers God will judge. And I believe that he's talking there of the impenitent. People who live and persist in this immorality demonstrate that they are enslaved to it and therefore become the subjects of God's judgment.

So let's now take apart this verse. We're gonna talk about, first, honoring marriage, and then we will address honoring the marriage bed. Making no promises that we'll get through both of those today, but that's at least charting the course. Honoring marriage among all—now, just read with me again the beginning phrase of verse 4: “Marriage is to be held in honor among all.” There is an interpretive challenge that we run into at the beginning of verse 4, and I want you to be aware of it. There's some question regarding the translation of the verse, and different translations translate it differently. There is no verb in the opening phrase. And so the verb must be supplied by the translator, and when the verb needs to be supplied by the translator to make the translation flow and have some sort of meaning, it is subject to some interpretation as to whether what is being described is a command to be obeyed or a description that we are to observe. That's the difference. Is the phrase in verse 4 meant to be taken as a prescription or a description? Is it a command or a statement of fact? Is it an exhortation or simply a

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declaration? And so you see this difference of translation between the King James, for instance, and the New American Standard. The King James takes this as a statement of fact, a simple description or declaration, and the translators translated it this way: “Marriage is honorable in all.” Marriage is honorable in all. Notice that's just a statement of fact regarding the nature of marriage and the honor that it has. Marriage is honorable in all. A statement describing the nature or the substance, the quality of marriage. Now the NASB, another modern translation, translates a little bit differently. They translate it as a command, a prescription, an exhortation. And so the NASB translates it, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all.” That describes a certain perspective on marriage that should inform our thinking; it should inform our heart. It is a perspective on marriage that requires us to do something, namely to honor marriage. So is it a description or is it a prescription?

Now I would submit to you that it cannot be a prescription unless it first is a description. In other words, marriage must be honorable if the author is telling us that we should honor it because God would never command us to honor something that is dishonorable or that is not honorable. So if it is an exhortation—that is, a command for us to approach marriage and to handle our marriages in a certain way—if it is an exhortation, then it must also mean that marriage, first and foremost, is itself an honorable institution.

Now I take this as an exhortation, a command, and I'll give you a couple of reasons why. First, you'll notice that verse 4 is in a list of other commands. “Let love of the brethren continue” (v. 1). Love strangers (v. 2). Love prisoners (v. 3). The second half of the phrase is also a command: “The marriage bed is to be undefiled.” So this is in a list of commands. Verse 5 says, “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money.” That's a command. Later down in verses 7 and 8, the passage that deals with submitting to authority, that is a command. And so we have this list of exhortations and commands in chapter 13. I think that chapter 13, verse 4 is to be taken as an exhortation, a prescription, something that we are to do. Because marriage is honorable, we are therefore to honor marriage among us and honor our individual marriages.

The second reason I take it as a command is because the second half of the verse, verse 4, is also a command. That is, we are to approach the marriage bed in a certain way, namely to guard its purity and its sanctity and its holiness. We are to maintain the purity and holiness of that aspect of our marriage.

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And the third reason I would take it as an exhortation is because the second phrase is really dependent upon the first. If marriage is not honored, then neither will be the marriage bed. If marriage is not honored—it's the top command—if that is not honored, then neither will be the marriage bed. Show me somebody who does not guard the purity of their own thought life and their own heart and their own marriage bed, and I will show you somebody who does not honor marriage, who does not have a high view of marriage. These two things go together. And the one who has a high view of the marriage covenant is going to expend every effort, give all diligence to preserving and protecting that which you honor and love. We always protect the things we love. We always protect the things we honor. And so if somebody does not protect the purity of their marriage bed, they are not protecting their marriage. These two things go hand in hand. So he is not simply declaring something true about marriage. He is exhorting us to honor it and to hold it in honor. And that is the first step.

So we can take two points from this. Number one, that we should honor marriage, and second that we do this by maintaining the purity and sanctity of the marriage bed. We honor marriage by maintaining purity and sanctity of the act within marriage that is authorized and created by God.

And I don't want you to miss what verse 5 says because there is a connection between verses 4 and 5. And before we go any further, I want you to see this connection. Look at verse 5: "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" I want you to see a connection there. In verse 4, he talks about sex. In verse 5, he talks about money. Are these two related? You know what the two greatest causes of conflict within a marriage are? Sex and money. Do you know what couples fight about more than anything else? Sex and money. Do you know what reveals the condition of our hearts more than anything else? Sex and money. And do you know what two things have both not only been causes of great conflict but causes of untold harm and destruction? Sex and money. These two things go together hand in hand. They are both causes of untold harm and untold destruction in the lives of unbelievers, in the lives of believers, and in the lives of churches. The amount of destruction that has been wrought because of lust and greed is incalculable. It is indescribable. You cannot even put a quantitative figure on it. It's immeasurable. It's everywhere.

Lives have been ruined because of greed and covetousness and the love of money. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:9–10 warns about this: "But those who want to get rich fall into

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temptation and a snare [listen to this language] and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith [What's that? That's apostasy] and pierced themselves with many griefs." The love of money itself is a cause of apostasy.

And then lust. How much ruin and hurt and betrayal and destruction and devastation have been wrought in marriages, in lives, in businesses, in churches, and in ministries because of sexual lust. Can you put a number on that? We cannot. The amount of destruction, the number of tears that have been shed because of infidelity and pain and bitterness and destruction and betrayal and the hurt and the ruin would fill an ocean. We can't quantify that.

These are the two most destructive things that we give places of idolatry and worship to in our hearts, and they promise to do nothing but ruin us. Well, that's not exactly true. They promise to do all kinds of things for us that are all lies, and what they end up doing is ruining us. That would be a better way to say it. And these sins stem from the same impulse. According to Proverbs 5 and Proverbs 7, it is the fool who says in his heart, "Though this has ruined countless other men, I can do this and remain untouched." It is the fool who says in his heart, "I can take coals into my lap and not be burned." It's the fool who says in his heart, "This may have destroyed other marriages, but it won't destroy mine. This may have ruined other women, but it won't ruin mine. This may have turned other children against their fathers, but it won't turn the hearts of my children against me. So I can do this, and I can get away with it. I can do this, and I can keep it hidden. I can do this, and nobody will know." Every man who has fallen and been ruined by that has believed that lie at some point in their life.

These sins stem from the same impulse, and you and I ought to notice what that impulse is and understand what that impulse is. Sexual impurity and covetousness both are a discontent with what God has provided. It's a discontent with what God has provided. The man who seeks more material possessions, always something more, always something extra, always a little bit more—it is a discontent with what God has provided. It looks in the face of what God has given and says, "I will not be satisfied with this. I must have more. And so I must work harder, and I must get more." The same is true with sexual immorality. My wife or singleness, either one, this is what God has provided. And I am discontent with this, and therefore I will pursue satisfaction in some other way than through God's ordained means for me to be satisfied in this. Both of

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them come from a heart of covetousness, a heart that desires something illicit, something that is not theirs, and it really is an idolatry of the heart. See, it is the idol of covetousness. It's greed that gets set up in the heart, and then this idol demands that we sacrifice everything on that altar to serve that idol. Your children—put it on the altar. Your clean conscience—put it on the altar. Your purity—on the altar. Your relationship with the Lord—on the altar. Your reputation—put it on the altar. And it is a fool who is willing to take everything that God has given to them and lay it up on the altar in front of that idol and offer it in service to that idol. The covetousness and the greed and the desire for something illicit that God has not provided, that is what motivates both the covetousness in verse 5 as well as the sexual immorality that is prohibited in verse 4.

Another thing that these two things both have in common is that obeying these commands in verse 4 and verse 5 are both expressions of love for our neighbor. How do I love my wife? I love my wife by honoring my marriage and by honoring the marriage bed. How do you love your husband? You love your husband by honoring your marriage and by honoring the marriage bed. How do I love my neighbor? By not coveting their stuff and taking their stuff. You see, both of these are expressions of what it means to love one another that is described in verse 1.

Now, let's talk about what marriage is. Before we talk about honoring it, let's understand what it is and why it is what it is. So I want to begin with a definition. You never used to have to do this by the way, to define marriage. It was something that was patently obvious for all of human civilization for six thousand years up until about five minutes ago when we decided we were going to redefine marriage as a culture. But we now have to define the obvious because we live in a world that is at war with reality. And so we have to define what reality is now. Marriage is intended by God to be between one man and one woman who become one flesh for one lifetime. Get that phrase in your head. One man and one woman who become one flesh for one lifetime. That is God's design. John Owen describes marriage as this: "It is the lawful conjunction of one man and one woman by their just and full consent into an indissoluble union whereby they become one flesh for the procreation of children and mutual assistance in all things divine and human." Now that is simply to say it is two people who enter into a covenant with one another by their just and full consent, a union that normally results in the procreation of children. There are exceptions to that obviously, but it is a union that normally and most naturally results in the procreation of children. It is a union that creates a oneness and a unity, a one-fleshness. There is within marriage the mingling of souls between a man and a woman. You don't remain two separate and independent

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souls any longer. There is the union of souls in marriage. That union of souls takes place and is fed by and continues to express itself in the sexual act within marriage. We're mingling souls in marriage. And when you tear apart a marriage, you are tearing apart something that has been brought together by God, and there is an irreparable harm that is done when those two souls are ripped apart because we're mingling souls as part of the covenant. And it is a union that is for the good of the man and for the good of the woman.

Marriage is a certain thing, and the government may want to pretend that it is something else, but it can never be anything other than what it is. They can promote a mirage, they can promote an illusion, they can promote a fable, a myth, a falsehood and call it marriage all day long, but it is not. They say that it is simply a legal agreement between any two parties. It could be two men, it could be two women, and we're not very far down the slippery slope yet from here before we'll be saying it's two men *and* two women or nine men and three women or whatever we want to make it out to be. They think it's something that our culture defines or the courts can redefine, but we didn't create it. We didn't institute it. Mankind didn't come up with it. It's something that God came up with, which makes it honorable. And we live in a country that thinks they can redefine whatever they want—man, women, truth, falsehood, lies, the truth, etc. Morality, right, wrong. And they want to give different definitions to all of those things, and it's no surprise then that marriage would be offered up on the altar to the spirit of the age.

Now this means to affirm anything other than what I have just described regarding marriage—that it is the union of one man and one woman who become one flesh for one lifetime—to describe or affirm anything about marriage other than that is an act of blasphemy, and it's sinful. So this means that to speak of a man and his husband is itself to speak of a man giving birth. It's like the same thing. This does not exist—a man and his husband. A woman and her wife does not exist. There is no such thing. This is nonsense. It is as much nonsense as to speak of people changing genders. That does not happen. You cannot change your gender. Why? Because your gender is written on every cell in your body, and you cannot alter that. You can change your perception of yourself. You can change what you call yourself, but you cannot change your gender. Your gender is established by God and written inside of your genetic code. It is the same thing with marriage. You can talk about—you could say a man married another man. That doesn't make any sense. It's incomprehensible. It's ridiculous. And so to affirm that is itself to blaspheme marriage. Likewise, to attend a same-sex marriage is to dishonor marriage.

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To celebrate a same-sex marriage is to dishonor marriage. To speak of my sister or my mother and her wife—to describe that as if that has any legitimacy whatsoever is to dishonor marriage. It is to speak something that is profane and blasphemous. And it is therefore to profane and blaspheme a holy institution. To celebrate it, to congratulate it, to send a gift—these things dishonor God because they dishonor the institution of marriage. So to view marriage or to describe marriage as anything other than one man and one woman becoming one flesh for one lifetime is itself to profane God's good gift and to blaspheme the God who established that gift. That was self-evident until five minutes ago in human history. That was self-evident. Now it needs to be said, and to say it makes you a pariah, it'll probably make you a prisoner, like we talked about last week, to even utter these things.

Now why is marriage honored, and what makes it so honorable? Let me give you a couple of things that make marriage honorable since we're talking about the description of marriage. It must be honorable if we're commanded to honor it. Why is it honorable? It's honorable first and foremost because of its source—that God created it. It is His ordinance, it was His idea, and in fact it is an expression of His wisdom. He said, “It is not good for . . . man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). And by the way, it's not good for a woman to be alone either. But He's the one who said this is what is good. And so marriage, therefore, in the institution of it, is an expression of God's wisdom and His love to provide what is good for His people, for His creation. And since He created it, He gets to ordain what it is. He brought the sexes together in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, a man and a woman, and in His design, He defined what marriage is. Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man [one man] shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife [that is, one woman]; and they shall become one flesh.” And Jesus and Moses revealed that that was intended to be a lifetime commitment.

Now Jesus, by the way, did not take a more progressive or liberal or libertine approach to the subject of marriage than you find in the Old Testament. He did not come onto the scene and say, “Look, I know you've heard that marriage is between a man and a woman, but I say unto you”—Jesus didn't say that at all. He didn't redefine it. He didn't take a more liberal approach to it. Because Jesus was an orthodox, theologically orthodox, Jew who affirmed at every turn what is said in the Old Testament regarding marriage. And every time He quoted the Old Testament, whether it was the law or the Psalms or the poetry section, every time He quoted that, He affirmed the authority of it and the truthfulness of it. So when Jesus comes onto the scene, He doesn't give us

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anything different about marriage than what had been affirmed all the way through the Old Testament.

Further, marriage was created for man in his innocence. In his innocence. It was prior to the fall, prior to sin, prior to the curse. That means marriage was not given as something to overcome the curse and not given as sort of a crutch to help men deal with the curse. It was given to men in their innocence when they were holy and innocent and had not yet corrupted themselves. So their minds were not corrupted, their hearts were not corrupted, they had no sinful inclinations, and it was in that context that marriage was given to them so that they might enjoy not only each other but the pleasures and benefits that come with the marriage relationship. And therefore marriage and the marriage bed are honorable and sanctified since they were created for man as a good gift to him in his state of innocence.

The second reason that it is honorable is because Jesus Himself honored marriage. We already mentioned the connection in Genesis 2:24. But Jesus affirmed that teaching in Matthew 19 when He says from the beginning God created them man and woman and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and [cleave] to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (v. 4). And then Jesus heightened the teaching on marriage by saying what God has brought together, let no man separate, let no man divide that (v. 6).

Jesus not only affirmed marriage there in Matthew 19—oh, by the way, let me answer an objection that is commonly raised regarding Jesus in this connection. People will often say who are defending same-sex relationships, same-sex attraction, and same-sex marriage—people will often say Jesus didn't say anything about homosexuality. Is that a true statement or a false statement? It's true in that He never used the word *homosexual*, but it is false in that He never addressed it because He did address it. He did address it in Matthew 19. By the way, when somebody says that to me—“Jesus never said anything about homosexuality”—a good rejoinder to say back to that is, “So you're telling me Jesus never had a good thing to say about homosexuality?” He did say something about it. In Matthew 19 when He pointed back to the garden of Eden, Genesis 2, Jesus said this is what marriage is. God has defined it. This is the purpose of it. This is how sex is to be used and the context in which it is to be used. And therefore, anything outside of that is itself *porneia*, immorality and adultery. So He did address it. He did speak of it because He described what God's purpose is. And therefore, anything outside of that purpose is outside of the good purpose and plan of God.

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Second, Jesus not only testified to the honoring of marriage in Matthew 19, but Jesus honored marriage Himself when He performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee in John 2. The first place He did a miracle in John 2 was in Cana at a wedding. And by turning water into wine, He contributed to the joyful, jubilant celebration of that feast and of that marriage. And by making that the place where He would first reveal His miracle-working power, Jesus authenticated that marriage and honored it not only with His presence but also by making it the place of His first miracle.

And third, marriage is honorable because it is a picture of the relationship that Christ has with His church. Marriage was created as a symbol, a sign, a picture of something. The drama of redemption is in view in the marriage covenant. The man plays his part of Christ as he provides for and protects his bride. And the woman plays the part of the church as she submits to the headship and leadership of her husband and as she honors him and respects him and helps him. Both of them through that mutual act of other-centered, other-focused laying down their lives for the sake of the other one, both of them in that act are acting out the drama of redemption, for in Scripture the church is called the bride of Christ. Christ loved us, Christ died for us, He pledges Himself to us, and marriage is a picture of that redemption. Maybe you didn't know this when you signed up and said, "I do," but when you said that, you were agreeing to play your part to fulfill your role and to honor your vows. And you weren't just simply saying, "I'm entering into a legal contract that will make the distribution of our assets when we both die a little easier." You weren't simply agreeing to a cultural convention that makes life a little bit more convenient and gives you certain tax benefits. You weren't agreeing to that. What you were doing was entering into a drama of redemption.

There is One who has given His life for His bride, the church, and He calls us His bride. And He woos us to Himself, He initiates that relationship, He enters into that covenant and pledges Himself to us, His bride. And the church is the recipient of that sacrificial laying down of myself; no more of my interest; no more selfishness. The church submits to that and embraces that and benefits from that. And so it is in the marriage relationship; the man is called to lay down his life for his wife, just as Christ did the church. Sacrifice. "But, but, but my needs"—irrelevant. "But my wants"—it's irrelevant. "It's not comfortable." I don't care. Nobody cares. "It's not convenient." It's irrelevant. None of it matters. Every excuse you can offer is irrelevant. You can stand before the judgment seat of Christ and say, "Well, I would have obeyed that, but the woman that thou gavest me, Lord"—you're not going to be able to say that. All of that is irrelevant. "But he doesn't love me like he should." It's irrelevant. "He doesn't care for me like

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Christ does the church.” So what? None of that has any bearing upon this truth that your marriage is a stage upon which the glory of God and the gospel is to be played out in front of the watching world, in front of every other couple in the church. Each sacrificing and giving to the other, honoring the other and thus honoring the marriage covenant. Each one laying down their lives for the sake of the other, putting aside their interests and considering the interests of others as more important than themselves. Seeking to benefit and bless the other partner above all things. That is what the gospel is. And when the world looks at Christian marriages and they see that on the world stage, it says something. It is the gospel being played out.

You're not just “you do the dishes and I'll do the laundry” or “I'll take care of the car and you take care of the house.” It's not that. How banal is that type of arrangement? How simple, how stupid, how worldly? How empty is that? But instead when Christians say, I'm going to honor my marriage because God has given me an opportunity to display the gospel to everybody who watches. And so therefore as a man, I will lay down my life for my wife just as Christ did the church, or as a woman, because I am displaying the gospel, I am going to honor, respect, and love and care for my husband just as the church honors and respects Christ. So I will do that with the goal being that we would display the glory of God in our relationships and in our marriages and in each of us fulfilling the roles that God has given to us.

The man is to pursue—and I'm just speaking to men now because I am one, have been for quite a while. The man is to pursue Christlikeness in his marriage. Christlikeness. And men, if you have no desire to be like Christ, you have a serious problem. I would suspect that you're not even saved. You have to look that deeply at your heart. Does that mean you have a passion, it's your all-consuming desire, it's the only thing you think about 24/7? No, none of us can do that. But is that desire there? Are you seeking to be conformed into the image of Christ so that you may learn to treat your wife as Christ would treat your wife if He were married to her? John MacArthur said, and I would affirm every syllable of this sentence, that you can tell what a man thinks about Christ by how he treats his wife. Likewise, I think you can tell a lot about how a couple thinks about the gospel from how they treat one another. The man who is verbally abusive and neglectful or harsh to his wife, who thinks not of her and neglects her, that is his view of what Christ is like to His bride. Do you want to be like Christ?

Marriage is honorable not just because of its source and not just because of Christ's testimony and not just because it is a picture of redemption, but marriage is honorable

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because of its purpose. The purpose of marriage is not just to make things more convenient. It's not to give you a tax benefit. It's not so you can split household duties or alleviate loneliness. Those things might happen as a result of marriage. They often do. But the purpose of marriage is to display the glory of God through a life that is lived in obedience to His commands. It is to put on display the redemptive purpose of God in creation.

Is your view of marriage that high? If it's not, you have an inadequate view of marriage. So let's lift our eyes a little bit. Let's come to realize why it is that we are to hold marriage in honor. It is the highest, the greatest, the most profound, and the most transcendent of all human relationships. It is the highest and the best, and the most glorious, and the most profound, and the most meaningful of any relationship that you can possibly have on this planet, on this side of eternity. There is nothing—you cannot have this kind of relationship with anybody else but your spouse. Only your spouse is the special object of this kind of affection and honor. And only in this relationship do you get to enjoy the blessings that come with it. It's a lifetime of work, I understand that. But it is the most profound and transcendent reality that you and I get to touch this side of Heaven. And therefore, when we do not honor it, when we tarnish it, and when we defame it, we are dishonoring and tarnishing and defaming the most profound, the most transcendent, the most glorious, and the most honorable relationship that we could possibly ever have. Let us not do that.

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