

Guarding the Honor of Marriage, Part 2 (Hebrews 13:4)

Turn now, if you will, please to Hebrews 13. We'll read the first six verses of this chapter. Hebrews 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 confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Heb. 13:1–6 NASB)

Well, the world is at war with God's truth. That is obvious even to the most casual of observer, that the most fundamental aspects of God's creation, of His ordinances, of His truth, of reality, are under attack. And we see this even in the fact that humanity is attacking humanity, and not in terms of war, but you actually have humanity making the case that the world would be better off without humanity. We live under a death cult. We are ruled by people who worship at the altar of a death cult. And so they make the argument that human beings should be destroyed in the womb and that the planet and that the environment and that all of creation would be better off if more people were dead and less people were alive. That is nothing less than a cult that worships death. They do this because Scripture says that those who hate God or those who hate His wisdom love death. And so those who hate God hate the image of God and they hate those who bear the image of God, and they therefore reject and kick against and assault and attack anything that reminds them of that creation and of God's creative act or even of the God who created us. And so you have humanity going to war with the very existence of humanity and making the case that humanity should be destroyed.

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Man in his rebellion despises God as Creator and hates everything that points to either God's creation or the goodness of God's creation, and they do this all the while being earth-worshipping hippies themselves who worship that creation. So rather than worship the triune God who made all things, instead they worship the creation itself, worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

God's creation of two genders, of two sexes, in the garden, was a good thing that shows His image. And by the way, up until about five minutes ago in human history, we all understood that sex and gender were the same thing. It's only recently where our culture and people who are insanely at war with God have tried to differentiate between those two things and divide them, as if your sex can be different than your gender and your gender may or may not conform to the reality of your biological sex. So you can identify with whatever gender you want even while having a certain biological sex, and the gender with which you identify may or may not comport to the biological sex with which you are born. Does that sound confusing? It is confusing, and it's intentionally confusing because the death cult has come up with this ideology.

And so, though God has created man and women, and only men and women, and He has created these two genders, and only these two genders, these two sexes, only these two sexes, since that is true, God Himself has the authority to determine the sex of every person that is created. So therefore, to deny that, to reject that, is an assault against the Creator Himself. It is to say that God has made a mistake, that in His wisdom He is fallible, that He has not made a good decision, that He has not ordained a good thing, and so it is an assault against God as Creator.

And because He has created the sexes and He determines the sex of every person who is born and everybody who has ever existed, He determines the roles that each gender is to fulfill and how they are to interact and thus how they are to treat one another. He is the one who has instituted marriage, and He defines the nature of it. And He is the one who has created sex, and therefore He has the authority to command or to forbid the ways in which sex is used inside of marriage and among humanity.

And we are surrounded by insane people who are at war with all of these basic and self-evident truths. All of them. Now I'm not worried about that, and neither should you be, because reality has a way of harming those who do not take it seriously. On the battlefield of human history, reality is like 1,000–0, always a winner, undefeated on the battlefield. Reality always wins. You can fight against it, you can deny it, you can go to war with it, but reality will always win.

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And the institution of marriage is always in the crosshairs of the devil and his people because it is part of God's creation, it is a good thing, and it is for the flourishing of those who are created in God's image because it portrays the glory of God, it shows His redemptive handiwork in Christ, and therefore the devil hates it. The devil hates it. And so we are inundated daily by overt as well as subtle attacks against marriage and against the family. Marriage is dishonored when immorality or divorce or infidelity are glamorized. Polyandry, which is having more than one husband; polyamory, which is having more than one sexual partner; and polygyny, having more than one wife, are all dishonorable perversions of God's good gift. Spouse-swapping, open marriages, throuples, hooking up, and shacking up all have become more commonplace in our culture, and they are all dishonoring acts toward God's good and holy gift of marriage and the marriage bed.

Now these things—polyandry, polygyny, polyamory, divorce, immorality, infidelity—these things are not new in human history. It's not like they just broke onto the stage last week and we're wondering, oh, what do we do in this once Christian nation—or that was once a nation that was founded on Christian principles? It's not like these things are new. These things are as old as time itself. It goes back to the garden. But the more our culture gets away from biblical truth and the more we regress back to pagan ideas and pagan practices, the more our culture is going to try to replace a biblical morality, which always results in the flourishing of God's creatures, with a pagan morality, which always results in the non-flourishing of God's creatures. And so like Indiana Jones trying to swap a bag of grain for an idol, our culture is trying to do this: they're trying to change out their moral standards and hoping that we don't notice and that everything, the whole temple, doesn't come crashing down. Well, the whole temple is going to come crashing down when you try to do that. And that's what our culture is doing.

God's truth honors marriage. God's truth never disparages marriage. God has placed upon marriage the highest honor possible by making it a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. That is why we, as part of the church, are called the bride of Christ. It's not that any one of us individually is the bride of Christ, but this body to which we belong is the bride of Christ. And that analogy that Scripture makes between Christ and His church and the man and the woman in the marriage covenant, and that covenant that exists, that is a way of honoring marriage and glorifying marriage and showing how God esteems that.

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So we have in Revelation 19:6–9 this reference that someday you and I are going to sit down with Christ and enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb.

6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”

8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Rev. 19:6–9 NASB)

Revelation 21:9: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.” That's who you are. If you're in Christ, you belong to this bride, the wife of the Lamb. No higher honor. Marriage is a picture of redemption, and thus it was not an afterthought. It was not in the mind of God just two thousand years ago to draw this analogy. It was in the mind of God before He ever spoke an atom or a molecule into existence. It was His design before the garden to make marriage a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. So as long as you have been on the mind of God as an elect sinner whom He chose, He has had in vision the relationship between you and your Savior, between Christ and His church, and in the garden, when He brought Adam and Eve together, He was instituting that picture. Therefore, that is an honorable institution. The Father chose a bride for His Son and gave that bride to the Son so that the Son then would come into the world, take upon Himself human flesh, live in the place of that bride, earning all of the righteousness that that bride would need to be wed to Him. Then He died in her place, rose again the third day, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. And that bridegroom will come again and receive His bride to Himself. And then we will sit in glory and we will sing hallelujah and praise to our God who has done this great gift.

And when did He choose you in Christ? Before the foundation of the world. When were you elect in Him? Before ever an atom was spoken into existence. As long as God has been God, you have been in the mind and the plan and the purposes of God, and

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therefore marriage as an institution, created and ordained in the garden, has been the plan and purpose of God from the very, very beginning. You say, “When was the beginning?” The beginning was begun before there ever was a beginning. That far back. That's how far back you have to go. That's when marriage was designed.

And so that brings us to our text, Hebrews 13:4, which we got halfway through last week. Verse 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.” And we ran out last week before we had time to finish considering all of the implications of this first part of the verse. There was an exhortation here to hold marriage in honor and to hold the marriage bed in honor. And just by way of review, let me quickly bounce off just four quick statements to remind you of what we covered last week.

This is a command in verse 4 to honor marriage because marriage is honorable. It is honorable as part of God's design, which is one man and one woman becoming one flesh for one lifetime. That is God's design. That is an honorable design.

Second, marriage is honorable because God has ordained it. He ordained it before the Fall. It was in His mind before creation. It was part of His plan for eternity past. And since it was ordained before the Fall, it was given to man in his innocence, meaning that also the unity and the sexual intimacy of the marriage bed was a gift to man before sin ever came into the world. Before sin ever entered in, that was to be enjoyed in a holy and pure environment with holy and pure and undefiled minds and hearts.

Third, marriage is honorable because Christ honored it by affirming the teaching of Scripture in Matthew 19, going back to Genesis 2:24, and by affirming marriage in performing His very first miracle at a wedding. It was honored by Christ.

And then fourth, marriage is honorable because it is a picture of Christ and His church. It is in marriage that the gospel gets really applicable. When you take two people who are sinners and you cram them into one house and make them live face-to-face every day, day in and day out, to go to sleep looking at each other, to wake up looking at each other—when you do that, you are setting yourself up for all kinds of conflict. Well, there's good news. This is where the gospel gets lived out. We confess to one another, we repent to one another, we forgive one another, we are restored to one another, we learn to lay ourselves down for one another, to sacrifice for one another, to serve one another, to do everything for the benefit and the blessing of the other person. This is

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where the gospel is displayed; it is on the stage of marriage. There is no greater relationship.

I think it was Martin Luther who said marriage is a school for the soul. You want to take your soul to school? You could try saying that, especially in front of people. You want to take your soul to school? Get married. You will learn the greatest lessons that you can possibly learn inside the marriage relationship. You will learn to sacrifice. Marriage will be for you the source of your greatest joys and your most profound disappointments and sorrows—will be the marriage relationship. It is a teacher of the greatest lessons. It is a tool to conform you to the image of Christ. And it is not only a means by which you are conformed to the image of Christ; it is the stage upon which you pursue holiness without which no one can see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Now all of that is by way of review. Today, we want to consider how this verse answers some theological and practical errors, three of them particularly. And then we want to talk specifically about how it is that we honor marriage and ways in which some people dishonor marriage.

Let's talk about the errors that this answers first. We can affirm from Scripture that marriage is honorable. It is holy, sacred, created by God, given to man as a blessing for his flourishing in the garden before sin. It is worthy of holding in high regard and high esteem. It is God's good gift to us, and it serves many good purposes. Further, you'll notice in verse 4 that the author mentions the marriage bed, that the marriage bed is to be undefiled. The word translated "bed" there is *koite*, from which we get our English word *coitus*. The word can be translated "bed," it can be translated as "sexual life," or even it is used as "conception." It describes sexual intercourse or the sex act. It is not describing a piece of furniture upon which two people sleep and never touch. It's not describing a piece of furniture. It is describing the expression of covenant love, the marital union, marital coitus, the physical one-flesh relationship or act that is reserved for marriage. That coitus is the expression of covenant love and unity and the mingling of souls. It is part of marriage and should be enjoyed regularly inside of marriage, physical handicaps being the only thing that might withstand that.

This also, the sex act or coitus, is good. It is a gift of God, a beautiful expression of service to one's spouse, an expression of love and pleasure and delight and joy, and this was God's design. And listen, it was part of creation before the fall, an aspect of Adam and Eve's life before sin ever entered into the world. Get that in your mind. It was an aspect of their life before sin ever entered into the world. Adam was not tempted to sin

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by lust. Adam was tempted to sin by a piece of fruit. I've never been tempted to ruin all of humanity for a piece of fruit. But probably every man in the sound of my voice has been tempted, would be tempted, to ruin all of humanity to satisfy or gratify a lust. Therefore, Adam's sexual desire, Eve's sexual desire, and the fulfillment of those desires are things that were created by God for human flourishing and given to our first original parents in the garden before there was ever a sin. Therefore, coitus is not dirty, it is not disgusting, it is not impure, it does not defile. We defile it. It does not defile us. We defile it. Notice that the text does not say, "Don't let the marriage bed defile you." It says, "You don't defile the marriage bed, because it is something that itself is pure and holy, and so the purity of it should be guarded at all costs." The sexual act does not pollute a marriage, it doesn't defile the spouse, it doesn't tarnish your piety or impede your holiness, it doesn't corrupt your mind, it is not a necessary evil or a begrudged obligation. It is not sinful within the God-ordained context of the marriage covenant.

I'm going to stop there because my wife, by this point, is probably becoming very uncomfortable with the fact that I have to stand up here and say all of this. But the discomfort will only increase next week when we talk about guarding the marriage bed. So make sure that you come back for that. And if you're not here, we will all know why you're not here.

So we want to answer some practical questions, some practical theological errors that often creep up in our thinking regarding these things, three of them. Roman Catholicism, Gnosticism, and Asceticism. Roman Catholicism, Gnosticism, and Asceticism. If you're not sure where any of this is going, I will explain it as I go through this.

First, Roman Catholicism, particularly as this applies to Roman Catholic leaders. They—that is, the Catholic Church—forbid marriage to their bishops and to some of their ecclesiastics. In some instances and in some wings of Roman Catholicism, you can be a married priest. That is true. If you become a priest or are ordained to the priesthood after you have been married, Rome does not suggest that you take a vow of celibacy. Though there are some segments of the Roman Catholic Church that will only choose their priests if they are single and if they are willing to take a vow of celibacy. Now to be fair, Roman Catholics would object and say, "No, we do not forbid marriage from our priests. We do not forbid it." They would say that the vow to celibacy is a voluntary vow. They voluntarily give it up. "We don't forbid it; they voluntarily give it up." OK, kind of voluntary like your taxes are voluntary, right? You don't have to pay taxes. They are

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voluntary contributions to a well-functioning government. But try not paying taxes and what do you get?

So they do forbid marriage, as if marriage is not worthy of their holy men. In fact, you can go to the Catholic Answers website and read up on this question, and Roman Catholics will say, and this is a quote, “Celibacy is a sign of purity.” Celibacy is a sign of purity. Do you buy that? Do you buy that, watching any of the headlines about Roman Catholic priests in the last, I don't know, seventeen hundred years? Because it's been about that long. You can go back to times in Roman Catholicism where they referred to the Pornocracy, a Roman Catholic hierarchy that was known for its immorality. They didn't even make a pretense of being holy.

As if piety and holiness and purity are incompatible with marriage and with the marriage bed, true piety and true holiness comes in denying marriage, they would say. And so John Owen says, “They vainly imagined that they are more pure than Adam and Eve were in their innocence.” “It was OK for Adam and Eve in their innocence before they sinned, but our priests, they're too holy to be engaged in marriage or in the marriage bed.” God said it is not good for man to be alone, and Rome says, “No, it's better for men to be alone.” And how has that worked out? You know, as it turns out, marriage goes a long way—when properly used and when properly enjoyed, marriage goes a long way toward prohibiting and preventing sexual immorality and sexual deviancy. And when you take men who have those desires and you say, “Holiness is achieved by you denying those desires and not enjoying any of that common blessing, that blessing of common grace. Instead you're going to take a voluntary vow of celibacy,” and then you put them alone with that, that does nothing to subdue the desires of the flesh, nothing at all.

1 Corinthians 7:9 says, “But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul does acknowledge that there are times and circumstances in which singleness might be preferred to marriage. There are instances in which that is the case. So Paul mentions the distress of the current time, and he says it might be that, because you sense persecution is coming or things are difficult, you might remain single. And if you have that gift of singleness, God gives you that ability to do that and you can do that, then you might remain single for the sake of giving yourself more wholly to the Lord's service and not having the concerns that come with the family. But, Paul says, there might be people who are not able to do that, and they might determine to get married, and the one who marries

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doesn't sin, and the one who decides to stay single does not sin. And so sometimes circumstances determine that somebody might be better off single and they might pursue that as a legitimate option.

First Corinthians 7:32 says,

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;

33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,

34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:32–35 NASB)

So, Paul says, there might be instances where remaining single will allow you to give undistracted devotion to the Lord. But then for many people, being single doesn't result in undistracted devotion; it results in undevoted distraction. So, Paul says, get married in that case. So you evaluate your circumstances in that and you apply wisdom to the circumstances and say, “Man, I can't give undistracted devotion; all I'm consumed with is undevoted distraction. And so I have to get married.” That's fine, Paul says. To require celibacy for a Christian is the very kind of false doctrine that Paul describes as doctrines of demons in 1 Timothy 4. Paul says,

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Tim. 4:1–3 NASB)

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Both marriage and food are created by God to be abundantly and joyfully enjoyed by those who believe and know the truth. And it is a doctrine of demons to forbid marriage or to advocate for celibacy inside of a marriage covenant or to tell somebody that if you really want to be holy, avoid marriage. I would say the opposite is the case. If you really want to learn what it means to mortify your sin, get married. That will give you opportunity to kill your selfishness faster than anything else. At least it should.

Second, the Gnostics. Not only the Roman Catholics, but also the Gnostics. Maybe that's not a word that you are familiar with. Gnosticism was an ancient heresy that actually predated Christianity. Nobody knew or called it Gnosticism in the first century, but there were forms of proto-Gnostic belief. Gnosticism as a worldview came into sort of full bloom later on after the formation of the New Testament, but you can see references to certain Gnostic tendencies or certain Gnostic ways of thinking in, for instance, 1 John, or in the book of Colossians, where some of the proto-Gnostic heresies were addressed. Gnosticism was the belief that there is some secret knowledge that is available out there to only the initiated, and that those who are the initiated, who know how to get the secret spiritual decoder ring, as it were, can give you some kind of spiritual insight into the deep truths. And in understanding these deep truths, then you would come into the fullness of what it means to live in this world. And when it crept into Christian circles, it kind of manifested itself as the belief that if you knew these deep and profound truths—not the ones that are revealed in Scripture, but the ones revealed outside of Scripture—then you could have sort of a fullness of understanding and come to a fullness in your Christian life.

One of the Gnostic beliefs was the belief that physical and material things are impure and evil and profane, and that only the spiritual and the immaterial, the soul, was pure and good, so that all things physical had been corrupted by the fall, so anything which had any kind of a physical dimension to it was inherently evil and could have no good purpose whatsoever. And so obviously they would believe that the physical body is evil and that we are chained to it in this life.

Now Christianity has a direct answer to Gnosticism because Christianity says not that you are going to be free from this body after you die and go to some higher spiritual plane, but guess what. You're going to get shackled to this very same body but in resurrected form on the last day. So Christianity doesn't say everything physical is evil. Christianity says God created everything and it was very good, in the beginning. It's sin that has corrupted this creation and marred it and in many ways ruined it. The body is

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good and God pronounced creation good, but we are fallen and broken and ruined by that sin. And the ruin is not the result of being in a physical creation, because we will spend all of eternity in a physical creation, a new heavens and new earth with glorified bodies, resurrected glorified bodies. And that will be very, very good.

Now, interestingly, Gnosticism resulted in two very different applications of that theology. In fact, these are polar opposites of one another. Gnosticism resulted first in exaltation of abstinence. And here's why. If the physical body is evil, then the desires of the physical body are evil. Therefore if I satisfy or gratify the desires of my physical body, that is evil. Therefore I have to abstain from any kind of sexual activity even within marriage and not give way to any kind of physical desire or physical comfort. It's almost a form of Asceticism, which I'm going to address here in just a moment. And so rather than having anything to do with the physical body and satisfying that in any way, the Gnostic would say you need to abstain from anything that is physical for the sake of keeping your spirit and your soul pure.

That was one sort of application of Gnosticism. The exact opposite of that is something entirely different. And that is lascivious sexual immorality. Because the Gnostic could also say, "Since the body is evil and the spirit is pure, my body and my spirit never mix. Therefore the functions of my soul and my immaterial self are never polluted by the functions of my body. Therefore I can do anything and everything with my body to gratify its sexual lusts, and that will not affect my soul at all."

You could be a Gnostic and be committed to abstinence, and you could be a Gnostic and be committed to sexual lasciviousness. Gnosticism was *very* popular, very popular, because it did give to the Greeks an excuse to indulge their every sexual passion. Anything. And they could maintain then that this had nothing to do with their spirit and with their soul. And of course Christianity says, "We are body and soul. These two things exist together, and we can do things with our body that sins against ourself. And so we need to be careful with how we use our bodies, so we use it for the glory of God. And we don't just indulge in these sexual appetites simply because we think that it doesn't affect our soul." That's the biblical teaching, that the body is good and it can and should be used to the glory of God. So eating and drinking and sexual relations within the marriage covenant—properly—can glorify God. And this body will be raised to eternal life. We will be raised male and female in the new creation. For Jesus Himself had a real physical body in His resurrection. He exists today in a real physical body. Therefore, the physical body is not evil. You can see what Gnosticism has to do with the resurrection of

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Christ. They have to turn it into a spiritual resurrection and deny bodily resurrection because in their mind, anything physical is evil.

So we are fallen with sinful corruptions and expressions of these God-given desires. We have wicked desires in our physical body, that is true. Our faculties, our thinking, our motives, our desires are all wicked and corrupted. We cannot escape them in this life, and so we must constantly be killing the sinful proclivities and desires. The sinful thoughts, the sinful actions, the sinful deeds, we must be constantly killing them because those are not pure. They're not holy. They're not given by God. Instead, they are corruptions of God's good gift. So therefore, neither abstinence nor sexual immorality inside of the marriage covenant is proper. And the Gnostic belief that the body is evil and the marriage bed is evil is wicked and unbiblical.

So not just Roman Catholics and Gnostics, but third, Ascetics. Asceticism is the practice of rigorous self-denial in order to be more spiritual. Any cult that you get into or any cult that you observe that talks about this, you can see Asceticism is almost in every form of legalism and almost every cult. Asceticism is the practice of denying yourself things like marriage, food, clothing, comfort, convenience, pleasure, delight, and joy, as if the denial of these bodily enjoyments or bodily comforts liberates the spirit to be more in touch with the divine. As if the way to grow your own piety and holiness and spirituality is to deny your body any kind of comfort. The goal in Asceticism is to be more righteous and more pious and more holy and more pure.

And to be clear, we're not talking here about denying sinful lusts. Be careful to understand that. When you deny a sinful lust, you are not practicing Asceticism, you're practicing mortification. You're killing the sinful lust. But Asceticism says that we deny ourselves things that are not sinful, things that are God's good gift that have to do with comforts and conveniences so that we might transcend to some exalted plane, some spiritual plane where we are more in touch with the divine.

That thinking eventually crept into the church, and I'll give you a couple examples of this. Anthony, who is credited as the founder of the Christian monastic movement, he is said to have never changed his vest or washed his feet because doing so would be to pay attention to his own body, and in doing so, he would think, undermine his spiritual progress. Simeon Stylites famously lived the last thirty-six years of his life on top of a small fifty-foot-high pillar where he was exposed to the elements day and night, day after day, year after year for thirty-six years, and he denied himself the comforts of shade or warmth, sleep, food, conveniences, bodily delights. He lived on a pillar with

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nothing else, and they would raise his food and his waist bucket up and down to him on a rope. And he lived up there as his way of living away from the world and denying himself all the good stuff. Why? It was closer to God. And fools, like moths to a flame, would gather around that and look at that and say, “Ah, the holy man up there. Look what he's denying himself.” That's Asceticism.

Origen, who lived in the third century, castrated himself thinking that it would free him to more devoutly serve God. Others throughout church history have starved themselves, lived in silence, taken vows of poverty, exposed themselves to harsh physical abuse, pain, suffering, discomfort, and slept on a bed of nails. Martin Luther laid down in his room and slept on a cold, hard rock floor without a blanket and used a stone as a pillow all to try and mortify and kill the fleshly desires, thinking that in doing this, he was benefiting his soul and drawing closer to God. As if all of these things would kill fleshly desires and would liberate a pure spirit from the corruption of the body. Paul in Colossians 2:20–23 deals with this very theology. He doesn't call it Asceticism, but he describes it, and it is a rose by any other name. Listen to what Paul says.

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

23 [Now listen to Paul] These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (NASB)

Abuse your body all you want; you will never kill your lust. You can cut off body parts. You can scar yourself. You can starve yourself. You can deny yourself every comfort that life promises or offers and you will not kill your lust. You cannot kill your sinful desires by abusing your body or denying yourself legitimate pleasures. You kill your sinful desires by not indulging the sinful desires. That's how you kill it. Make no provision for the flesh. Don't feed the flame. Don't put your eyes on that thing. Don't send your heart down that path. Do not give your mind to meditating on those things. And instead you take your members, which you refuse under the power of the Spirit to give as instruments of unrighteousness, you take those members and you make them do righteousness. You put off the old man. You put on the new man. You stop thinking this

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way. You start thinking that way. You stop practicing this and you start practicing that. You replace those affections, sinful affections, with new affections so that the power of a new affection pushes out all those other affections. So you give your mind, your heart, and your members to that thing, denying the sinful proclivity, denying the sinful desire, not feeding it. You feed it and you will become its slave, I promise you. That's what Romans 6 teaches. You feed it, you will become its slave. And you will find yourself in bondage to that sin.

Those are the practical and theological errors that this verse corrects. Now, what does it look like? Changing gears as if we had no clutch—we're just pulling it out of one gear and slamming it into another one. So here's the grinding sound. What does it look like and how do we honor marriage?

We honor marriage by refusing to honor the things that profane it. I mentioned this last week, and I need to get a bit of an addendum to something I said last week. Last week I said it is a profaning and a dishonoring of marriage to attend a same-sex wedding ceremony or a transgender wedding ceremony. I had no idea when I said those words last Sunday that in the previous week or previous time that it would hit the news this week that Alistair Begg would have given opposite advice to that. So you probably saw that all over social media and Twitter, that Alistair Begg said a Christian could not only attend a same-sex wedding or a transgender wedding but also send a gift just so long as the people who were there and part of that service understood your own Christian convictions and commitments. I had no idea that he had said that or that that was going to happen this coming week when I made my comments last week, and I want you to know I stand by the comments that I made last week. This is terribly concerning to me. I have loved and respected Alistair Begg for decades—a faithful ministry, faithful expository preaching. I really have. I've met Alistair on a few different occasions. I've had multiple conversations with him. One conversation probably lasted about thirty minutes. He doesn't know who I am. He wouldn't be able to pick me out of a lineup, and if you said, "Jim Osman," he wouldn't have a clue who I am. He doesn't need to. That's not the point, but it's just to say that I have tremendous respect for him and I'm praying for his repentance and his reconsideration of that horrible advice.

And I want you to understand that to acknowledge or to congratulate an institution or a ceremony that dishonors Christ in that way is egregious sin. It is egregious sin. There is no consideration that might alter that assessment. You and I would get outraged to see a cross of Christ submerged in a jar of urine as art, or to see Christ portrayed in a play as

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a closet homosexual, or to hear a rap song or some other song that dishonored our Savior. If that outrages us, then it should outrage us also that the holy institution of marriage would be brought into any church or any venue and be defiled and profaned by two people of the same gender/sex. That should horrify us and outrage us every bit as much as seeing a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine.

Second—and by the way, first-century Christians, they used to be fed to the lions rather than burn a simple stick of incense to the emperor. Be fed to the lions. Today we're wondering, Is it OK for Christians to go to a gay wedding? That's then versus now. These issues are not nuanced, they're not complex, they're not multifaceted, they're not difficult, they're not textured, they're not complicated, there's not shades of meaning to any of this, there are no considerations to it. The fact that we even consider or ask ourselves, "Would it be allowable for us to do this?" is a testimony itself to the sad state of the church and the teaching that most Christians get on this subject.

If you're worried about offending somebody by not attending a ceremony, your priorities are all messed up, entirely in the wrong place. Because I promise you, you will offend Christ by attending. So you're going to offend somebody one way or the other, and I promise you, you're not going to stand before that homosexual couple on judgment day and give an account. You will stand before Christ and give an account. Therefore do not contribute to or participate in the defamation of that holy institution.

Second, we honor marriage by how we think about it. How do we think about it? This is a question you have to answer. Do you think of marriage, and particularly your marriage, with a kind of reverence and awe and gratitude? Do you see it as God's precious gift to you, something that you can pursue and should pursue and work at and enjoy and delight in? Do you think that marriage is worth your efforts and your time and your treasure? Do you think of it as a transcendent blessing or just the lesser of two evils? "Ah, I guess it's better than being single. Ah, I guess if you want the milk, you better buy the cow." Look, I didn't make that up. Don't groan at me as if—I'm just expressing the sentiment that I have heard men express. That is a way of dishonoring the holy institution. How do you think of marriage? Sometimes it's possible for us to dishonor marriage in our hearts and in our mind just by how we let our mind think about our marriage, about marriage, about our spouse.

Third, we honor marriage by how we talk about it. You see, our speech reveals our heart. It is out of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). So how do you speak about marriage? I'm not talking about just marriage in general but about your marriage.

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It doesn't mean that we ignore the issues in our relationship and we say, you know, "Honey, we can't address anything that's going on between us because Jim said we shouldn't say anything bad about our marriage." That's not where I'm going with this. You need to address those issues. But is the negative in your relationship all you see? Is that all you see? What you go without, what he doesn't do, what she doesn't do? This need that's not met, this expectation that's been crushed, this disappointment that consumes you? Is that all you think about in your marriage? Is that all you can speak about, the negatives? Certainly there's some silver lining there. There has to be something upon which we can build.

We should never say that marriage is a burden or marriage is nothing but troubles and disappointments. "Man, back when I was single, man, I was free, I had money, had time, do whatever I want on a Saturday. And I got married, and now I'm told what I get to do on a Saturday and somebody else sets my calendar and takes all my money and spends it on things I would never spend it on." Of course, when you're single, you'd never buy makeup or anything like that, but now you have to. Right? Is that how you speak about marriage and to your wife? "Better go home to the old ball and chain." We've said that, haven't we?

How do you speak about marriage to your children? And I cannot tell you how important this is. Are you training your children to think that a career and college and prestige and a reputation are important and that they shouldn't worry about marriage and kids? "Go out, get a good job, get established, see the world, establish yourself, live your life on your own terms, get settled." That's horrible advice. Why would you do that? Get married young. Get married young. Make it your goal. If you're going to marry, make it your goal to pursue marriage and marry young. Marry well because you should marry once. But if you can, marry young. God gives you that opportunity. Don't set that blessing aside so that you can go out and be selfish for ten years.

How do you speak about marriage to your spouse? And how do you speak *about* your spouse? This will tell how it is that you feel about your marriage. Let's not pretend that we can hold marriage in honor and honor this verse and the intention of this verse while we run our spouse down with our mouth or in our heart. We can't do it. That is a sin that must be mortified and killed. You have to mortify that. Let us not pretend that we can speak evil of our spouse and dishonor our spouse while we are honoring our marriage covenant. Christ does not do that to you. Do not do that to your spouse. Men, our role is to build up our wife, to use the authority, the resources that God has given to

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us for her edification and for her good. Our role is to use our time, our talents, our treasure, our skills, and to spend ourselves for the good of our wife and for her flourishing spiritually.

Fourth, we honor our marriage by keeping and cherishing our vows: to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, provision and want, in good times and in bad, till death separates us. Did you pledge that before a triune God? In the presence of witnesses? If you pledged it, if you stepped into it, then you need to step up to it. No excuses, no looking for escape hatches, no desire to bail, no blaming the other for your failures or for their failures, no excusing of our own shortcomings. But through repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation, we honor marriage and our spouse and we live out the gospel.

Now the truth is that probably anybody who has been married and who hasn't been married, and that's everybody, has failed in this regard to some degree or another at some point in their marriage or in their life. That is true. And I tell you—I said this last week to somebody privately—the easiest thing in the world for a preacher to do is to stand up behind the pulpit and pistol-whip the congregation and make them feel guilty for having failed to do everything that the Scriptures require them to do. And I was reminded by this person that I spoke with that the gospel wounds and the gospel heals. So yes, the expectation of the text wounds us. It makes us realize how far short we have come. But the gospel offers us the salve for our soul, and it heals us by reminding us that our acceptance in the Beloved and before the Father is not determined by our ability to keep all of the commands. That doesn't mean we excuse it, but it does mean that we remind ourselves that another has lived in our place and died in our stead so that we may have eternal life and that we may have righteousness.

And so the answer is not to deny our sin. The answer is not to excuse our sin. The answer is not to pretend that it doesn't exist and say, "I'll do better from this point forward." The answer instead is to confess to our God and to our spouse and to repent of those sins in those ways which we have dishonored our marriage or our marriage bed or our spouse and then to receive that forgiveness from Christ and to walk in holiness and to mortify that sin. That is the answer. We have salve for our souls in the gospel. But that can only be enjoyed and applied by repentance and confession and self-denial as we mortify the sins that dishonor our marriage. Seek forgiveness and restoration and work to honor the good gift that God has given to you.

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The fifth way that we honor marriage is by guarding the marriage bed from all enemies. And we'll take the entire Sunday, next Sunday, to talk about that. That is complex.

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