

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

And will you please turn now to Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13. And before we pray, we're going to read together verses 1–6.

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)

The Christian sexual ethic—you can tell right from the first words here that we are getting into some deep territory—is revolutionary and transformative and prior to the New Testament was incredibly rare. The church was born into a culture that was awash in sexual immorality, depravity, perversion, lasciviousness, and licentiousness, a culture that looked at many points much like our own. But by my judgment, we are not there yet. And of course, I say that, and you have to take that with somewhat of a grain of salt because obviously I live in this time and not that time. But from what I have read, and I'm going to give you some examples of it here, the culture and the environment of the first century was worse than what we have today.

Our culture, as depraved and wicked and astray as it is, is tame in many ways compared to what you would have been exposed to had you lived in the first century. The birth of Christianity and the living out of a biblical sexual ethic introduced to the first century something that had been virtually unheard of: chastity. Virtually unheard of in the first century. In many ways, the ancient world was a moral sewer, and this was true not just among rank pagans, but it was also true in some Jewish circles. In some Jewish communities, adultery, immorality, and divorce, as well as polygamy, were as

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commonplace as among the rank pagans and the Gentiles. Certain Jews did practice polygamy. Justin Martyr, in his book *Dialogue with Trypho*, discusses Christianity with a Jew, and he says this: "It is possible for a Jew, even now, to have four or five wives." Jewish historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, said, "By ancestral custom, a man may live with more than one wife." Divorce in the Jewish world was tragically easy, and in the ancient world the Jews had the highest ideals of marriage, but that was a low bar because among the pagans it was worse. If you thought that the moral culture of the Jewish first century community was bad, under the pagans it was worse. In some schools in Jewish circles, a divorce could be declared without a court action, without a decree, and for nearly any offense that a man might conjure up out of his imagination. "She burned my toast." "She came home late." "She's not giving out her conjugal rights; I'm divorcing this woman." For almost any imagined offense. And with such a loose law of marriage and divorce, women were the losers in such a circumstance because a man could put away his wife for any reason, rendering her ineligible to remarry and unappealing to marry by any other man. And in that culture, that would exclude them from the marketplace and from the job place. And so a woman in that culture, if she was divorced, would oftentimes have to resort to sexual immorality, promiscuity, prostitution, just in order to make ends meet because otherwise she would be destitute. And such a stigma that could attach itself to a divorced woman in that culture motivated some to remain single and to grow old and to never marry.

In Roman culture, it was even worse. According to Roman law, a wife had no rights at all. Cato said this: "If you were to take your wife in adultery, that is to catch her in adultery, you could kill her with impunity without any court judgment. But if you were involved in adultery, she would not dare to lift a finger against you, for it is unlawful." You might think that that would deter adultery and divorce and fornication and immorality, but it did not. Didn't deter that among men or women. Ovid, who lived in 46 BC, said in his book, *The Art of Love*, "These women alone are pure who are unsolicited, and a man who is angry at his wife's love affair is nothing but a rustic boor." In other words, the only pure woman is a woman who hasn't been asked yet. And men, if you're upset with your wife's infidelity, you need to get with the times. You're just being a prude. Seneca said, "Anyone whose affairs have not become notorious, and who does not pay a married woman a yearly fee, is despised by other women as a mere lover of girls; in fact husbands are got as a mere decoy for lovers." You got a husband just to hide, to shield, the reality that you were being promiscuous with everybody out there. And, according to Seneca's words there, if you don't have so many affairs that you have

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become notorious, the other women look at you as if you're just playing; you're just a lover of girls; you're not serious about that part of your life. Seneca also said, "Only the ugly are loyal." Now, make of that what you want. Yeah, wow! Now listen, just to be clear, I didn't say that. I'm quoting Seneca. "Only the ugly are loyal." Also, Seneca said, "A woman who is content to have only two followers is a paragon of virtue." Restrict yourself to two, you're a paragon of virtue. So, polygyny, polyandry, and polyamory were so commonplace that a long-lasting, faithful, pure marriage, free from divorce, adultery, fornication, was an anomaly. Serial divorces followed by remarriage, adultery, immorality, pederasty, concubines, and widespread serial fornication were not just present in the ancient world, they were ever-present, almost omnipresent, in the ancient world.

And into that context stepped the divine creator of marriage and sex, and He said, quoting Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." And He didn't stop there. He said,

6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

8 He [that is, Jesus] said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way [in other words, that was not God's design].

9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt. 19:6–9 NASB)

Jesus, unlike other rabbis of His age and of His time, did not come up with clever ways to excuse adultery or polygamy or find some clever interpretation of the law that would allow them to be engaged in sexual immorality and sexual activity outside the confines of marriage. In fact, He highlighted the law's demands in Matthew 5 when He said,

27 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery';

28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matt. 5:27–30 NASB)

In other words, the violation of that commandment—thou shalt not commit adultery—takes place before the physical act is ever committed. The violation of that commandment takes place before the physical act is ever committed.

Jesus reaffirmed what was from the beginning. So therefore, any faithful, biblical sexual ethic will reflect God's design and intention, and it will affirm what the apostles affirmed, what God said in the Garden, what Moses said at Mount Sinai, what Jesus said on the mountain, and what the apostles recorded in the New Testament. A biblical, faithful sexual ethic will affirm that, and it is a revolutionary sexual ethic. One man, one woman, becoming one flesh for one lifetime. That is God's design. Chastity before marriage and faithful, monogamous sexual activity in marriage, that is the design. Anything outside of that is foreign to God's intention, it is foreign to His purposes and a violation of His Word. That is the sexual ethic that obeys God's creation order and His mandate from the Garden all the way through the Old Testament into the New Testament. It is that sexual ethic that results in the protection of women and children. It is that sexual ethic that builds civilizations, protects homes, and results in Christian and human flourishing. And it is that sexual ethic that our culture is abandoning at breakneck speed to its own destruction and demise.

So in the context of the Old Testament truth and in the context of Jesus teaching on this subject, it should not surprise us to find the command that we have in Hebrews 13:4 which addresses this, even though it is addressed to a first-century Jewish audience, because even in the first century in the Jewish audiences they needed to be reminded that “marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Now we have spent the last two weeks, the last two Sundays, considering our responsibility to honor marriage—why it is honorable, what makes it honorable, how it is that we honor it, the commandment to do so. And now we are turning our attention to the second half of that verse, which is the command to honor the marriage bed. We

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honor marriage by guarding the marriage bed. And guarding the marriage bed is a means by which and a primary way in which we honor our marriage covenant and our spouse. So today we're going to look at what a pure bed is, what makes it pure, and then we're going to look at the threats to this. That's as far as we're going to get. You will notice in your bulletin that it says *Part 1*, because next week we are going to look at how it is that we guard the marriage bed. Not just why we guard it, but how we guard it.

So let's turn our attention to verse 4. There is the command here to honor the marriage by guarding the marriage bed. He says in verse 4, "The marriage bed is to be undefiled." Now, if Scripture affirms that marriage is a good thing and that it is honorable, that it is holy and sacred and created by God, if Scripture affirms that it is worthy of holding in high regard and high esteem and that it is a good gift of God to His creatures given to man before sin entered into the world, to Adam and Eve to enjoy—and they did enjoy that before the fall—if that is true, then the sexual physical expression of that covenant love and that purpose is also pure and holy and sacred and good. That is something that we have to get into our minds. The physical union of a man and his wife, that one-flesh relationship, was created by God, and it is honorable and it is good. In fact, the word that is translated marriage bed here is the word *koite*. It is sometimes translated "bed," sometimes translated "conception"; sometimes it is translated as "sexual life." We get our word *coitus* from this. It refers to sexual intercourse or the sex act. It is not describing a piece of furniture that you sleep on where your wife stores her pillow collection. That's not what it's describing. It is describing the one-flesh physical act that is to be reserved for marriage. It is not to be engaged in before marriage. It is to be worked on and worked at and enjoyed and developed all the way through your marriage. And it is never to be engaged in outside of marriage, neither before nor after you are married. That is what he is describing. He means here the expression of covenant love, union, and marital coitus, which is obvious from his reference to fornicators and adulterers at the very end of verse 4. This is the expression of oneness that goes with marriage and in marriage. It is part of marriage and should be enjoyed in that relationship, meaning that this is a good thing because God created it and gave it to men and women to be enjoyed inside the confines of the covenant of marriage.

It is a beautiful expression of your service to your spouse. It is an expression of love, pleasure, delight, and joy, and it is by God's design since it was given to us before the fall. Therefore, it is not dirty. It is not disgusting. It is not impure. It does not defile. We defile it when we misuse it and abuse it. We defile it; it does not defile us. The sexual act does not pollute a marriage. It does not defile the spouses. It does not tarnish your

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piety. It doesn't impede your holiness. It doesn't corrupt your mind. It doesn't make your heart drift away. It is not a necessary evil. It is not a begrudged obligation. It is not sinful at all within the confines of the marriage covenant.

So, our author says, the marriage bed, the coitus, should remain undefiled. It can be pure, and it should be pure, and you and I honor our marriage, our individual marriages, and we honor our marriage partner and we honor marriage's institution and we honor God when we guard the marriage bed to make sure that it is undefiled. That word that is translated "undefiled" is used four times in the New Testament. It means untainted, unsoiled, or pure. It describes something that is without anything that would render it impure, and its usage in the New Testament is instructive. I said it's used four times. I'll give you all four verses.

It is used in James 1 to describe religion. "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). Pure religion is a religion, a faith, that remains free from the corrupting, polluting influences of the world and the world system and the world thinking. And therefore, a religion or a faith that is pure will issue in good works. That's James's point in James 1. And it will remain untainted by all of the corrupting influences that surround us.

Second, the word is used to describe our inheritance, our heavenly inheritance, in 1 Peter 1:4: "To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." The reward that awaits the child of God is without impurity; it cannot be corrupted. It is untainted and it is without any tainting or polluting or corrupting influence. That is what it means to be undefiled.

And third, this word is used to describe Jesus, who is our High Priest. In the book of Hebrews, chapter 7, verse 26, he says, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." So there it is used to describe the moral purity and the moral quality of the Lord Jesus Christ. His separation from sinners, His untainted nature, who, though while participating in humanity and with and alongside and near sinful beings for His whole life, remained untainted, unsoiled, uncorrupted, and unpolluted by all the sinners around Him. He was pure, holy, innocent, without guilt, without guile, uncontaminated by the sin, the sinners, and the immorality, and uncontaminated and untainted and unsoiled by the immoral culture that surrounded Him even in His day, one that I just described to you as worse than our own.

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And then the fourth place it is used is here in Hebrews 13:4, where it says that the marriage sexual union, the marriage bed, must remain undefiled.

Now, there are a number of implications, then, from everything that I've laid out here, and I want to give you a few of them. Number one, this marriage bed is inherently a good thing given to His creation for procreation and recreation, for the production of children as well as the enjoyment and the unity between spouses. It is a gift, and it is a guard against sexual immorality, which is why Paul says it is better to marry than to burn. If you burn with passion, then go about the business of finding yourself a spouse and get married. If God brings that to you, don't put off marriage. If you cannot remain focused and fulfill the moral demands that are required of you under the new covenant, then you should get married. It is a guard against temptation and sexual immorality, and thus Scripture commands spouses not to withhold coitus from one another. 1

Corinthians 7:5: "Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." It is a good thing, a gift given to us to guard us against sexual immorality.

A second implication is that sexual union expresses a good thing, namely, the one-flesh relationship and the mingling of souls. I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago—it is the mingling of souls. That is what it means to be one flesh. Sexual activity is not just simply the fitting together of body parts. It's not just simply a physical act. That's not it. It's not merely a material exchange. Physical sexual union inside of a marriage is the mingling and the oneness of souls. It is souls coming face-to-face with one another. It is souls embracing one another, being vulnerable with one another, and coming together in unity with one another. Therefore, this is not something that ought to be just engaged in once every year or couple of years, because that is not the purpose of that gift. It expresses a good thing. It is begun by the sexual consummation of marriage vows, and it is continued through the nurturing and the flourishing and the continual enjoyment of that intimacy.

A third implication is that it can and should be enjoyed without defilement. It doesn't defile you. It doesn't make your marriage impure. It doesn't pollute your mind. It does not weaken the relationship. In fact, the opposite is the case.

The fourth implication is that the marriage bed does not defile us. Adultery defiles us, fornication defiles us, lust defiles us, our imaginations defile us, illicit sexual activities outside of the marriage covenant defile us and defile the marriage bed. But the

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marriage bed can be and must remain undefiled. It can be undefiled. Even in our culture it can be undefiled. Defiling activities are mentioned here—adultery and fornication—and this tells us what we are to guard against: sexual immorality.

And now we want to talk about some of the threats. What are the things that threaten this undefiled marriage bed? And brothers and sisters, I'm going to ask you now to gird up the loins of your mind because we are going to have some frank talk about some frank issues. So prepare yourself. And if you're not prepared and you're unwilling to prepare yourself, now would be a good time to leave. Don't leave.

The author mentions here adultery and fornication, but this is not a comprehensive list of the things that threaten the marriage bed. These are two things that threaten the marriage bed, but it's not a comprehensive list. Anything that is sinful can defile the marriage bed. Anything that is sinful. Fornication and adultery are not the only sinful things that can defile a marriage coitus relationship. Sin defiles it, and there are many sins that can pollute and taint the marriage bed and affect it negatively, turning it into something that it should not be. Now I'm going to give you a couple of them, and quickly, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this because the author does not spend any time on this, but just in order to get you to think outside of the box as to the other things that can affect our marriage bed. I'm going to give you a couple of examples.

Number one, selfishness. To approach the marriage bed selfishly, without concern for your spouse, without concern for how to serve, love, cherish, care for, or benefit the other person, to care only for your own gratification and your own enjoyment and not the delight of your spouse, that kind of self-centeredness, self-seeking, and self-gratification have no place at all in a physical relationship which is the act and the expression of mutual love, mutual enjoyment, mutual service, and mutual affection. It is not a one-way street, and if it *is* a one-way street for somebody who is married, something is broken, and you need to figure out what it is and fix it.

Second is the misuse or abuse of sex within marriage. To use sex against your spouse as a bargaining chip, as a leverage, as a reward for good behavior, as a way of getting something for yourself to hold it over them, is to take something that is precious in the sight of God, given as His gift to you, and it is to wield it as a weapon against your covenant partner. Your covenant partner is not an enemy to be conquered or a hostile enemy to be negotiated with. Your covenant partner is your partner. Most marriage conflict comes because rather than facing the same direction and seeing themselves as

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partners, the marriage partners see themselves in competition with one another or as enemies to be bested.

Third is sexual immorality, both physical and mental. Fornication and adultery is what the author mentions here, and both of these defile the marriage bed. Obviously, physical infidelity defiles the marriage bed. An affair is an act of betrayal and immorality and unfaithfulness. It is to break the vow that is made in the presence of God and to bring an illicit union into a marriage relationship. That violates the marriage bed. Physical fornication and physical adultery are not the only ways that you bring others into your relationship. There is also mental and emotional and spiritual unfaithfulness that also taint the marriage bed. All of these things are made possible and readily available to us because of the ubiquitous access that we have to pornography, which is a scourge to our society. And I will tell you something, we have not yet even begun to see the effects of this upon a culture. We've not even begun to see the effects of it. Not even started to see that. I'm old enough to remember when you didn't have an internet, and your internet was *beep, beep, beep, beep, bap, kuhhh*. It was that sound. You couldn't access anything but a local bulletin board to try and arrange to have lunch with somebody. And now we carry the entire world and everything that is produced for us on video in the palm of our hands with ready access to every server on the planet. We have it available to us. And my kids are the first generation to grow up with these devices in their hands and in front of their eyes. What is the next generation going to face and see? With the advent of AI and all of the corrupt technology that we have now, this is going to become even more ubiquitous. And unless the Lord rescues us from this, our culture is going to make the first century look like a kindergarten with high moral standards by comparison. We have not even begun to see the beginning of the effects of the readily availableness of pornography on a culture and on a people.

If you are a man or woman and you are indulging in pornography, you are being unfaithful. If you're single and you're doing that, you're being unfaithful to your future spouse. I'm going to talk more about this next week. If you're single and you're doing this, you're being unfaithful to your future spouse. And if you are doing this, it is because you are believing lies. And I want to give you a few of those lies. The first lie you believe is that this is going to satisfy your lust. It doesn't. It never will. It can't because it's fake. It's a cheap, pathetic imitation of God's good gift. And when you indulge in that, you are simply visiting a dry cistern that is going to produce more thirst and drive you back to another dry cistern. All pornography does is create within you dissatisfaction and discontentment with God's good gift. And here is the poison pill of

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pornography: it keeps you from enjoying the thing that God has given to you because you take your discontentment and your dissatisfaction and you bring that into the marriage bed and you will walk away from that discontent and unsatisfied, thinking that you are being cheated of something, and you're not being cheated of it. You're poisoning your own well. You're destroying your own ability to enjoy the real thing, the real gift that God has bestowed upon you.

A second lie is that you can indulge this without it affecting your marriage bed. You cannot take fire into your lap and not be burned. And if you think that you can do this without it affecting your wife, your kids, your marriage relationship, and poison your own heart and your own marriage bed, you're believing the lie. You're entertaining ideas and images in viewing pornography that dishonor your marriage and your marriage partner. The infidelity in heart, in body, and mind dishonor your spouse. You are negatively affected by it. Your physical relationships are negatively affected by it. Your conscience is negatively affected by it. For it dishonors and disrespects the covenant partner that God has given to you. You are giving your attention, your affection, your desires, intentions, your mind, your heart, your love, your energy, your time, and your soul to a vain imagination, and you have pledged all of those things to your spouse. So you're breaking your word and your vow to your covenant partner. Your fantasies, your lusts, your cravings, your imaginations, your affections are all being given to another—one who has no claim on them, and one you have no business giving those things to. And instead, in viewing pornography, we take all of those parts of our soul and we lavish them on a digital whore, a digital whore that is just an image. And if you saw that person in real life, they would not know your name, they would not care one whit about you, they would never care one whit about you, and they would probably not give you the time of day if you pass them on the street. What an empty cistern this is. What a vain imagination.

The third lie that pornography tells us is that the secret affair won't cost you anything. That's a lie. It will cost you *everything*. Everything. Because lust is an idol of the heart that demands everything. Just as the one true God demands all of us, so the idols of our heart demand everything from us. And that idol will demand that you serve it, that you give it your time, your attention, your affections, your lusts, your interests, your eyes, your heart, your soul, all of it. And it will eventually take all of that from you along with your reputation, your integrity, your conscience, your peace of mind, your walk with God, your wife, and your kids. It will take everything from you and give you nothing in the end. This is what is being described in Proverbs 7 with the naive man who eventually

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steps into the house of the prostitute whose house leads to Sheol, leads to death. It eventually robs him of everything. And Proverbs calls that man a fool. And pornography will eventually lead to physical adultery unless repented of and mortified. It will lead to physical adultery.

At this point you're tempted to say, no, no, no, Jim, you don't understand. I can stop at any time. I don't have to do this. This will never result in that for me. I have checks and I have balances on it. That is another lie that you believe because your justification for sin that takes you back time and time again to that digital whore that you indulge will be the very exact same justification that you will use to jump into bed with another man or a woman. The excuse is the same, the justification is the same, the thinking is the same, the rationalization is the same, and what you don't understand yet but you will at some point if you don't turn from it is that you have already paved the road to your own destruction. You have laid out the excuses. The excuses for mental adultery with pornography are the same excuses for physical adultery with another man or another woman. They are all the same excuses. The difference is one of degree, not of substance, and when you indulge that you get yourself used to making excuses for your sin, and here they are:

I can do this and it won't cost me anything. (And listen to this: all of these excuses and all of these rationalizations that are used to justify indulging in pornography are the same ones that you will eventually use to justify an affair.)

I can do this and nobody will know. My wife won't know; my kids won't know. I can keep it a secret; this will be my little secret.

I need this. I deserve this.

I can quit anytime.

It's just this once. I'll ask for forgiveness when it's all over. The Lord will forgive me, and I'll never go back.

My spouse drives me to this. If my spouse were more (fill in the blank with whatever demonic lie you want to put in the blank)—if my spouse were more ____, I wouldn't have to resort to this.

I can't be expected to control my urges; they're too strong.

This is easier than fixing what is broken in my marriage.

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This is the only way that my needs will be met.

All of those are damnable and demonic lies straight from the prince of darkness, and when you believe them and when you say them and when you act upon them, you are thinking his thoughts after him and he is leading you down that paved road to eventual destruction. Proverbs 5:3–5, “For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol.”

Proverbs 7:22:

22 Suddenly he follows her [this is the naive man we read about at the beginning of the service] as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,

23 until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it will cost him his life.

24 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth.

25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths.

26 For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain.

27 Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death. (Prov. 7:22–27 NASB)

We have been warned about what this costs. We've been warned.

Fourth threat is emotional infidelity, emotional infidelity. Now, men are more prone than women to seek after physical gratification outside of the marriage covenant. Women are more prone than men to seek after emotional gratification from others outside the marriage covenant. But both of these are a destructive defrauding of your spouse; both of them defile your marriage bed. Now, when I say men are more likely to do this and women are more likely to do that, please understand that that does not exclude either men or women from doing both of these.

If you have someone in your life that titillates your cravings, that draws your heart, who gives you the affirmation that you think your spouse is withholding from you unjustly, if you have somebody who always expresses their appreciation for you like your spouse

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never does, someone who excites you, someone you love to be around—you love being around that person. You like the way they light up when you come into the room. You like the way that their corner of their mouth sort of turns up at the side when they smile; it seems to be they smile only at you that way. You see the glimmer in their eye and their look; you're their hero, the best person always in their life. If you have a woman or a man in your life to whom your thoughts go, one who occupies your interests, excites your energies, and entices your attention, if you have someone, a friend, a coworker, an acquaintance, who elicits thoughts of infidelity and draws your affections, someone with whom you can and do imagine iniquity, you need to end that relationship now. Done. It should not last beyond 12:30. No texting, no emails, no messages, no FaceTime, no following on social media, no group chats. You don't go to their house. You don't go into their office. You don't visit them at work. You don't drive with them in a car. You don't talk with them alone across the back fence. The relationship needs to end. “Oh,” you say, “no, Jim, they're a friend.” No, they're a threat. Naive one, they are a threat. You don't understand that yet, but you will when you wake up in Sheol and they've taken everything from you. Then you will say, “If only I had heeded the counsel of Proverbs 5, and if only I had heeded the counsel of Proverbs 7, and if only I had listened to Hebrews 13!”

They're not a friend, they're a threat. “Oh, but we have to work together. We have to work side by side. We're in the same office space.” Then find another job. “They live across the back alley from us; we can't possibly avoid them.” Then sell your house and move. Do something, do anything, but end the threat. It will undo you. It will destroy you. It will take everything from you. You will be nobody's hero. You will lose your reputation, and you will lose everything. In this moment, in even justifying it or making excuses for it, you are offering up the very rationalizations that will destroy you. It is not a friend, it is not a benign acquaintance. It is a threat, and you must see it as a threat, and you must end it. You must go to war with that threat.

If your heart is already there, if your attention is already there, if your affections are already there, you have already crossed a line that you should never ever cross and you have already brought something into your relationship that is a foreign intruder and it is a threat to your intimacy and to your marriage covenant. And if you cannot deal with that and discipline your heart and if you cannot discipline your mind and mortify that sin, then there is no energy you should not expend. There is no expense that you should not go to. There is no length to which you should not travel to get that threat out of your life and to rid yourself of it once and for all. In crossing that line, you have made

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your heart and your affections and your attention belong to someone else, one who is not your spouse, one who is not your covenant partner. You've given that to somebody who has no right to it and you have no business giving it to them at all, ever. And to do so and then to excuse it with any rationalization or any justification—listen to me carefully—is to sin against your spouse.

We must work together as couples to guard the solitude and singularity of our emotional, spiritual, and physical union. That is what the marriage bed is. And if you're going to honor your marriage and be obedient to the Lord, you'd better go to war with every enemy, foreign and domestic, that threatens that. And you don't give up that war and you don't give up that fight and you don't stop fighting. You don't stop mortifying and killing those threats until the Lord calls you home. That's when you know you're done.

Now those are the threats. How do we do this? Where do we go from here? We have more to cover; I want to talk about how to protect this and how we fight the enemy, how we deal with the desires of our flesh and those influences, what we have to do. But I understand that this truth wounds us. It wounds all of us because we are sexual beings and this is where we sin first and foremost from our earliest ages. This is where it is easiest for us to fall. So every person in here has sinned to one degree or another in this regard. And so this truth and this frank conversation, I know, has wounded all of us here because we have all done this to some extent, and we need the healing that comes from repentance, confession, forgiveness, and the forsaking of our sin. Repentance, confession, forgiveness, and the *forsaking* of our sin. We stop making excuses. We go to war with our sin. Stop rationalizing, stop blaming others, stop excusing it, stop participating in it, stop courting the enemy. Stop being like the Trojans who bring the Trojan horse into the city gates, bringing this nonsense into your marriage bed. You are inviting the enemy in. The enemy is sin, and it is at war against you. And if you don't wake up and realize that you need to go to war against it in its every form, it will kill you, it will destroy you, and it will take everything from you. The wages are your soul, and that is what sin is after. So how serious will we take this?

Now you may say—and we'll talk more about this next week because I'm only trying to give you a little bit of salve because I don't want to leave you on such a heavy note after all of that. So I want to give you a little bit of hope, a little bit of healing, a little bit of grace in all of this. I've had to have a frank discussion with this. It's not often that I get to a text like this, so we have to stop and take our time. Frankly, it's not often that I get to

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any text, because we're always slow in getting to them, so it could be years before we get to another text like this. But this is something that we need to address because it is a real threat to us in our marriages and in our church, in our culture.

So I want to give you some salve before we close in prayer here. If you are saying to yourself, Jim, I cannot get free from this lust, these cravings. I cannot get free. The only way that that is true is if you are an unbeliever. It's the only way that that's true. You cannot convince me for one moment that all of the grace of God in salvation that has been poured out upon you in Jesus Christ, a grace that took you, a dead, rotten sinner, dead in your trespasses and sins and unable to respond to grace, and raised you to newness of life and has seated you with Christ in the heavenly places and given you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and adopted you into the family of God and then caused His Holy Spirit to seal you and to indwell you and who Himself now is sanctifying you and pursuing you through holiness and sustaining you with all of that grace poured out upon you—you're trying to convince me that you can't stop sinning?

We all have to get to the point where we realize that every time I sin, I am the culprit. Nobody else is to blame. I am the culprit. I own it. It's on me. Every last sin I commit, nobody else can be blamed for it. Only me. And it's a choice, because I'm a believer. If I'm an unbeliever, I can only sin. But as a believer, I can choose whether to indulge my lusts or not. That is my choice at every moment of the day. Therefore, the very first step is to stop making excuses and come face-to-face with the reality that if I am in iniquity, I am willingly giving myself, my instruments, as instruments of unrighteousness to become a slave to that unrighteousness. And I don't have to do that. And if you're in Christ, you don't have to do that. That is your choice. Don't ever tell me I can't be free from it. You can be free from it. You must be free from it. God calls you and demands you to be free from it, and He has given you everything you need to be free from it.

You don't have to sin. That's Romans 6. You don't have to. It doesn't mean that you won't ever. It means you don't *have* to. And when confronted with the choice, whatever that sin is, whether it is lust or anger or bitterness or resentment or greed or gossip or immorality, whatever it is, it is the believer who has the choice to be free from it. But you have to get to the point where you realize you don't have to sin. That's step one. Step two is saying, "I'm going to go to war with the sin and I'm going to kill it. And I will not yield my members as instruments of unrighteousness because I've been bought with a price and I don't have to do that."

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As Peter says in 1 Peter 4, in times past when you were indulging the flesh and living in immorality, wasn't that enough for you? That's the summary of 1 Peter 4. You had plenty of that back then. Didn't you have enough? What Paul says in Romans 6, those things that you once were slaves of that you now look at, what was your reward for that? What did you get out of it? The obvious answer to that is nothing, because sin and slavery to it gives us nothing.

We can be free because we are in Christ.

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