

## Honor The Covenant Of Marriage

Hebrews 13:4

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It's good to see you this morning. It's always such a privilege to open God's Word together. We are back in the book of Hebrews, if you would turn there with me.

Hebrews chapter 13, specifically today in verse 4. As you're turning there, I can distinctly remember the moment when my worldview came into great collision with my college professor. I was 19 years old, and my Spanish teacher at the time from Spain was teaching the class, and somehow the topic of marriage happened to come up. And I voluntarily explained that marriage at that time was at the top of my priority list.

I have wanted to be married since I was 5 years old, literally. At age 19, I was in constant prayer that God would provide a wife for me, and preferably sooner rather than later. You can ask my wife, I came on a little strong from the very beginning, because it was my desire not to date casually, but to get to the point and find my wife.

To my surprise, my professor didn't share my excitement for marriage at such a young age, and she got very animated and began to lecture the class on the importance of enjoying this stage of life and slowing down. There was plenty of time later to do something serious like marriage, but for now just have fun. Why tie yourself down to one relationship when there are all these people out there for you to get to know?

And that point of view of my professor is unfortunately not uncommon in the fallen world around us. For many Americans, sadly, marriage has become little more than a tax strategy. After all, as an unbeliever, why would you tie yourself down to just one person when there are all these people that you could be with? And how do you know that this person that makes you happy today is going to make you happy in a year or 5 or 10 years down the road? So don't risk it, they say. Just stay single, keep your options open, and enjoy yourself.

But what about the church of Jesus Christ? Is there a perspective of marriage that is commanded to be held by all Christians? The answer is a resounding yes. In our passage today, the author of Hebrews is going to help us respond corporately in our perspective of marriage. And it should be in stark contrast to the world around us.

Here in verse 4 of Hebrews 13 it says: *"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."*

Let me remind us just quickly what's brought us to this point. You remember The Superiority of Christ has been the banner, the theme, that we've been unpacking. That He is truly greater than all. And that brought us to the end of chapter 12.

You remember that final warning passage that all of this, this universe is going to be destroyed. And a New Heaven and a New Earth is going to be made in which we will dwell in Christ's kingdom with Him forever. And because of that, we are called to live lives of gratitude towards the Lord that flow out into faithful service of the Lord.

And what I want you to see is that chapter 13 is really a compilation of applications to all that we have learned. Both individually and corporately. This really is corporate instruction. As a church we should pursue these things and be defined by these things. And if you remember two weeks ago there were three practices that we began to unpack there.

In verse 1 we are to **Practice Brotherly Love**. In verse 2 we're to **Practice Intentional Hospitality**. In verse 3 we're to **Practice Compassionate Care**.

And today as we continue applying this we see another important practice for the church body. *“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 if you're new to our church, understand we practice something called expository preaching in our church. Which means we teach verse by verse through books of the Bible as the normal diet in our church. And so I've not cherry picked this verse for us this morning. This is in God's providence the next verse that we come to. And we seek to handle every verse with the seriousness that it deserves.

And so when we think about verse 4 here the main idea is simply this. **Every Christian must honor marriage and guard the one flesh union**. Every Christian must honor marriage and guard the one flesh union. So practice number 4 then is **Marital Honor**. Marital honor.

And here we have two descriptions about this reality. The first half of verse 4 is description number 1. The second half of verse 4 is description number 2. But the first description is this: **Honor the Covenant of Marriage**. That is, as an institution the covenant itself. Honor that covenant.

You might notice in your Bible the words “is to be held” are in italics. In the second half of the verse the words “is to be” are in italics. That's because literally those words aren't there in the Greek text. There's actually no verb in this verse which is not abnormal for Koine Greek. Instead, what we have is, for the sake of emphasis, the word that is to be emphasized starts the sentence in the Greek text. And it is the word “honor”. Honor is the key idea here.

That word honor means “pertaining to being of exceptional value.” And specifically, the thing that we're to honor of course here in the passage is marriage. It carries with it the idea of the commands that we have studied already earlier in the passage. So this is not a casual instruction. Even though there's no verb here, the idea is the same force of command is supposed to be behind this instruction. We are to honor the covenant of marriage.

The word honor here is used of physical objects to describe something that's very costly or precious. But when the word is used for something that's not a physical object like a relationship it's the word honor or respect. The idea is this covenant of marriage has inherent value. And therefore, all Christians are to hold it in the highest regard, with the highest esteem. It's to be respected.

Also notice how far reaching this instruction is. It says “among all”. It's to be held in honor among all. Every single Christian in the church is to take on this perspective both individually

and corporately as a body. This is how we are to live. Honor the covenant of marriage. This is true of single Christians. It's true of married Christians. All of us equally are to value and honor this great institution that God has given to us.

Marriage then should be honored in our homes. Our children should be taught from the youngest ages that marriage is good and it's honorable. And they ought to see that lived out in the way that we treat one another in our homes as they observe our marriage.

But that brings us to a couple of crucial questions about this instruction. Why must we honor marriage first of all? Why? And then secondly, how will a high regard for marriage show itself in our daily lives?

Well first of all let's consider the question number one. Why must we honor marriage? Or why must it be honored? The reason, I hope you understand already this morning, that marriage is to be honored because it's not a man-made institution. It is a gracious covenant created by God. Our creator, holy God, gave marriage to mankind.

Remember in Genesis chapter 2 it was God who said it's not good for man to be alone. And it was God also who said I'm going to solve that problem by making a helpmate for him. One who corresponds to him. An image bearer of God who is like him and yet different and she will correspond to him.

Then Moses in verse 24 of chapter 2 in Genesis, gives us a statement that explains that because of what God did there in the garden in bringing Adam and Eve together in that first marriage ceremony, now this will be a lasting ordinance for mankind. This will be the blueprint now for every marriage after this first marriage. Read with me Genesis 2:22-24: *"22 The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.' 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. "*

That's verse 24. "For this reason" that is because of what God did in this first marriage now we are to follow that same pattern. So this is the answer.

Why is marriage to be honored? Because God gave it to us as a gracious gift. He initiated it. He designed it and He implemented it. It is His to control and it's His creation. So if you are in Christ your life is dedicated then to the glory of God and the enjoyment of God which means we must honor the things that God honors. If God says marriage is to be honored then out of our honor for God we honor marriage as an act of love for Him.

So question number two. If that's true of us, how will a high regard for marriage evidence itself in our lives and in the church? What's going to happen? How is that going to change things? Well, let me give you evidence number one that that's true. If you have a high view of marriage then **We will uphold God's original design.** We will uphold God's original design.

First to honor the covenant of marriage will necessarily mean that we as individuals and as a church bind ourselves to God's created design for that covenant. As you know it's no secret, unfortunately, God's design for marriage is under attack in the world at large and in our nation as well. We have tried as sinful man to create a definition for marriage that is outside the bounds of what God has made and that's impossible. We do not have the liberty, no government has the liberty, to define what marriage will be. God has defined what marriage is and it's really very simple.

This is God's design for marriage. **Marriage is a covenant commitment before God between one biological man and one biological woman for life.** That's God's design. A commitment before God between one biological man and one biological woman for life. And as you know every aspect of what I just read in that description is under attack currently in our culture.

One of the ways that we've seen really as this began in our culture of letting go of a biblical understanding of marriage was with no fault divorce. This of course brings into question this idea of marriage being for life between one man and one woman. And thankfully we have Jesus' own words regarding this in Matthew 19:3- 9. It says:

*"3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?'" (Basically, they asked him about no fault divorce. Can we just divorce our wives when we get tired of them or whatever reason?) 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, (That also goes against our culture.) 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 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?" (Basically, why did Moses allow for divorce?) 8 He \*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. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

So here, basically, Jesus gives us his opinion on no fault divorce. And His answer to that is to point back to the garden, to the design. God designed it a certain way and we must not tamper with that design.

The only provision that He gives for a biblical allowance, not a command for but an allowance for divorce, is that of sexual immorality. And Paul goes on to add in 1 Corinthians 7, that in the case where a believer is married to an unbeliever, if the unbeliever wants out of the marriage, the believer can allow that unbeliever to leave and they are no longer under obligation. But outside of those two biblical provisions, of sexual immorality and abandonment by an unbeliever, divorce is simply not allowed scripturally. It's not permissible.

Now, as a Christian in this culture, that perspective stands out, does it not? That is seen as outdated, as barbaric, unkind, unloving, to limit divorce to such a point of view. But don't you see that's kind of the point? The church is not to be like the world. The world should look at the church and say, well, that's different. Why are those people like that? And to understand that we have a different authority. We are a people bound to an authority, to the Lord our God, as His will is expressed on the pages of Scripture.

And therefore, we will not, cannot budge. And so, honestly, unless the Lord intervenes, and He certainly could do something, it will probably only get more and more uncomfortable to hold a biblical view of marriage in this country. But hold it we must.

And it becomes a beacon for the gospel in the end, because we're a people set apart, not by our doing, but by the great grace of God.

Now I do want to be careful here and to say some things to make sure we have a balanced understanding. I want us to understand that divorce, unless it is biblically allowed in those two categories, is a sin, but it is not the unforgivable sin.

And we need to have a balanced understanding there. Sometimes we can quote Malachi 2:16, which is true, and we can say God hates divorce, but we often quote that as if it puts divorce in this separate category of sin that's different than others. But you know what? You know why God hates divorce? Because God hates sin.

And he says he hates other things in scriptures, like Proverbs 6.16-19:

*"There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: **17** Haughty eyes (pride), a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, **18** A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, **19** A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers."*

I think we're all guilty of things the Lord hates. And so let's be careful. Malachi 2.16 is true. It's in the Bible, but may we not use it in a way of overemphasizing that one sin as if it is sort of this other category.

But at the same time, Romans 6 is also in the Bible. This gives us the balance. We must not abuse grace just because there is grace, absolutely. Even if you have committed that sin and you've divorced your spouse and married another and now you realize, oh my goodness, I didn't have grounds to do that biblically. That was wrong, that was sinful. What do you do? You call out to God for forgiveness and He will forgive you, but we don't use the fact that God is gracious as a license for sin. Romans 6 gives us that balance.

There's a second evidence here. If we have a high view of marriage, evidence number two is **We will cultivate honorable thoughts and honorable words regarding marriage**. Honorable thoughts and honorable words. Jesus clearly taught us in places like Luke 6:45 that from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks, meaning the words that come out of your mouth betray what you've been hiding in your heart.

And unfortunately, when it comes to marriage, all too often we hear disparaging jokes and disparaging comments like, oh, the ball and chain, or get ready for the end of your life. You know, we remember when Rebecca and I were engaged, it used to frustrate us that people would say, oh, you'll see. Just, you know, just wait, you'll see. And we're like, no, we don't believe that's true. Let me tell you, it has not proved true. What we have seen is the great gift of marriage that God has given. And I praise God for my wife. She is not a ball and chain.

When God gave Eve to Adam, He added something good to Adam's life, not something evil. And He did not steal something from Adam in adding Eve. And we need to be balanced in our understanding of this. And I think the reason that we can get confused is because it's easy to look around and say, well, don't you see all the pain and the suffering that goes on in marriages? Don't you see how awful it can be? Of course I do. It's my great privilege, honestly, to help many couples who are struggling through very difficult things in their marriage.

But let me just, let me say this, we need to understand, marriage is not the problem. Sin is the problem. Why is marriage hard? Sin. Sin has corrupted every good gift that God has given to us. What is the solution to sin? The great gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there is hope for marriage.

Marriage is redeemed with the gospel because the two people involved are redeemed by the gospel. And now, by the work of the Spirit working in us as he sanctifies us, more and more our marriage can become what God intended for it to be, not in perfection, but certainly in the direction of what He has called us to. But we have to be careful not to throw out marriage because marriage can be hard. But to remember, sin is the culprit, and that is what we must attack.

So practically, if we're going to speak words that are accurate about marriage, it's going to begin with thinking thoughts that are accurate about marriage. If your heart comes out through your words, then you need to stuff truth in your heart so that your words are accurate and biblical.

So honorable thoughts ought to be cultivated about the covenant of marriage itself, like the institution, honorable thoughts ought to be cultivated in your mind about your own personal marriage on a daily basis, and honorable thoughts ought to be cultivated in your mind about the marriages of others that you are interacting with in your daily life. As we think biblically, we will speak biblically.

So when you speak about the covenant of marriage in general, speak of it as a gift of God. Speak of the goodness of marriage. When you speak to your spouse speak in such a way that's not disparaging of your marriage or your spouse, but in such a way that builds up what God has given you in your spouse. And when you speak to others about their marriage, maybe you have someone in your life, family or friends, and their marriage is really, really struggling, speak the truth to them. Don't undermine the gift of marriage simply because of the great pain that sin has caused. Help them to distinguish the two in their mind what the real issue is. But the world should hear a different kind of speech from the mouths of Christians when it comes to the covenant of marriage.

I do want to say one other thing to balance this, something I think that can often be unsaid when we talk about marriage. And I want to say this, having a high view of marriage does not mean that singleness is inferior to marriage inherently. The Bible is clear that marriage is a gift from God.

But there's also another gift, Paul says, there is such a thing as a gift of singleness. What is that? Well, it is a gift for a person to be fully content to live as a single person, including

being celibate, without having the burning desire for marriage and all that comes with it, so that they devote their life then to service of God. That's what Paul says about himself in 1 Corinthians 7:7:

*"Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, (He's talking about the gift of singleness) one in this manner, and another in that".* And he's clear, not everybody has it. I think fewer people have it than don't.

And so I just want to make the point that you are not a second-class Christian if you're unmarried. And even if you're unmarried and you say, boy, this gift of singleness doesn't describe me. I want to be married really badly. That's a good desire. Marriage is a gift. It's okay that you desire that. Just be careful, as with any good desire, that it doesn't become an idol in your life that you are so desirous of that you forget to use your singleness for the glory of God. As long as God would have you single, use that extra time and freedom that you have as a single person for the glory of God until He brings the person that he would have you to marry.

But the point for all of us in this passage is that all Christians, single or married, are universally to honor the marriage covenant as a good gift from God.

There's a third evidence, and this third evidence will actually bring us into the second half of the verse and the next description, but here's evidence number three. If we honor marriage, **We will guard the purity of the one-flesh union designed only for the covenant of marriage.**

Now this is such an important evidence, such an obvious evidence of you that honors marriage that it's actually the second description. So description number two here about how we honor marriage is that we are to **Guard The Union of Marriage**. Guard the union of marriage. This is the second half of verse four, which reads, *"And the marriage bed is to be undefiled for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."* So honoring marriage means we keep the marriage bed undefiled. You can cut out the words there that are in italics because in the Greek it's a very short statement "and the bed undefiled" is literally how it reads.

Now I think we're tempted to use this verse only in the negative sense sometimes. I think that's unfortunate because I believe there is a very positive way we ought to understand this verse and how positively do we really comprehend the reason for the negativity, the negative statement that follows it with the warning that comes after it.

There is a warning here, we'll get to that. But first of all, notice there's something very positive here because this is, this idea of the bed of course is a euphemism, it's for what Moses describes back in Genesis 2 as the two became one flesh, the one flesh union is more than just the physical relationship, but it certainly not less than the physical relationship in marriage. And here's the positive truth that we cannot overlook and that is that God did include the physical relationship as part of the package of gifts wrapped up in the covenant of marriage.

In other words, the physical union in marriage is something to be thankful for, it's something to be protected, to be pursued and enjoyed. But it is only good when enjoyed within the covenant for which it was made. That's the key here.

Let me say it this way, we ought not to think of the physical relationship as a gift from God and marriage as a gift from God in isolation. They are a gift that came as a package deal. They are both gifts but they are bound together, and they can never be, in a wholesome way, enjoyed apart from one another.

And so one of the ways that we honor the marriage bed in the positive sense is to be sure that for those of us who are married that practically we don't neglect the marriage bed in the marriage relationship. Paul makes that crystal clear in his letter to the Corinthians. Apparently, there were a lot of issues in Corinth, of a whole host of things, but apparently one of those issues was there was a teaching going around the church that celibacy even in marriage was the most holy way to live. That that was holier than the marriage relationship that we would normally understand.

And Paul writes to address that among other things. In chapter 7 beginning in verse 1 he says this: *"7 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, (so they must have written a letter to him and one of their questions had to do with this idea of being celibate even in marriage because this is what they said that he is now quoting what they brought up. This is a statement they made) it is good for a man not to touch a woman. (That's a euphemism) 2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife (also a euphemism), and each woman is to have her own husband. "*

So he corrects that misunderstanding false understanding and says no, celibacy is not in and of itself a more righteous lifestyle. In fact, it's wrong for the Christian who is married to act that way. Instead, verse 3: *"The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 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."*

Now this morning I'm not going to dive deeply into those verses. I did do a three-part seminar on the marriage bed in a small group just with married couples where I could speak more freely about these things. That's recorded if you would like to go and hear that, it's on the Resources page under Downloads, there a slides that go with that and you're welcome to go and access that.

I'm just going to make a few high-level comments about this passage that will help us understand how to apply our passage in Hebrews.

First notice that Paul advocates not for celibacy in marriage but for the mutual pursuit of the one flesh union and the word mutual there is important. Let me be very clear. First Corinthians 7 is not a weapon that you use against your spouse when this area is not going the way you wish it was.

The emphasis in First Corinthians 7 is not on your right to take something from your spouse but your duty to give something to your spouse. It is a call to the selfless pursuit. You selflessly pursuing the good of your spouse.

Whatever that is in this area, it is not a call to take from your spouse but as both are seeking to selflessly serve the other, now we have the picture of what God intended for that to be. A time of fasting in that regard is allowed Paul says, but it's only allowed by mutual consent for a short time so that you can pray.

Now let's be honest. I've yet to meet anyone. Please tell me maybe, if it happened to you and that's been a reason you've done that but I do hear about this being an issue in long periods of time passing but not because we're praying. Usually it's other things.

So let's be honest. The Bible is very clear. This is a good gift that God has given and this is the positive sense in which we ought to understand Hebrews 13 verse 4. Within the context of marriage, it should be pursued but there is a negative side to this a warning as well because he says here marriage is to be held in honor among all and the marriage bed is to be undefiled. So it not only is about what we are doing it's about what we are not doing and this is not just an instruction against the sin of adultery although it is that. He makes it very clear it is that it's just more than that. It refers to much more.

What this passage is teaching is that any activity of that kind outside of the covenant relationship that God created it for is to defile the marriage bed because it dishonors marriage. Remember those two gifts came as a package. You cannot have one without the other. That's the reason. You have taken something that God has created a certain way and you've twisted it and you've used it for your own selfish gain. Therefore, it is a defilement of the marriage bed even when two single people engage in these activities outside of the covenant of marriage.

Now the world says don't worry about it. I mean after all love is love and so if you love each other it's fine. Problem is the world doesn't know the first thing about love. This is not love. This is lust. This is not the love that God commends in the scriptures. And so we have to be careful not to adopt the world's understanding of these things.

Let me say it this way. If you're a young person here, a young adult and hopeful of marriage let's pretend for a moment that getting married is like buying a house that has a hot tub. If you want to use the hot tub you have to buy the house. The world's going to say to you, listen, all those bills, the mortgage, all that pressure. I mean who wants to have a house? Just go get in the hot tub. You just go around all the other stuff and just get in the hot tub.

The problem is God says no. You can't have one without the other. You're trespassing. It's a breach of God's law to use that hot tub apart from the ownership of the house. And on that same topic let me say this. Young people who are praying towards marriage, while we are on that topic, understand it's crucial to know that marriage is about so much more than the hot tub. The hot tub is a gift that comes as part of marriage, but do not get married just for the hot tub. It is much, much more than that.

And to the married among us let me say if there are problems with the hot tub it's usually true that the issue is not the hot tub it's the house. There is something wrong with the house itself. There's foundation problems, you forgot to pay the electric bill. The lights went off. No power to the hot tub. But usually there are other things.

Now I will say I want to be balanced. There are sins that can have happened in a marriage. There are sins that can have happened to you. There are physical elements and things that certainly can contribute to issues there, but often the first solution is not to go and try and fix the hot tub in isolation from the house, it's to step back and see what's going on with the house. And when you fix the issue in the house a lot of times you find out the hot tub was never broken to begin with.

That was the best PG illustration I could come up with. Hopefully it was helpful. But don't miss the bigger picture.

It's no small thing to defile the marriage bed. It is no laughing matter. Few things are more destructive to marriage than this. In fact defilement of the marriage bed is so universally understood even by unbelievers still largely that adultery is a violation of the covenant of marriage. We understand this innately that that's just wrong to the point that God uses adultery as the illustration for idolatry so often in the Old Testament because it's something we can identify with. To say we know that pain. We know what kind of breaking of a covenant that is and God says that's similar to other gods who are not the one to whom you have covenanted. Go read Hosea. Go read Ezekiel. Go read most of the prophets and you will see these illustrations where adultery is used as a way of communicating just how devastating the sin of idolatry is. It's a breach of that covenant.

And of course Jesus clearly taught that sexual sin is not just a matter of outward action. It's a matter of the heart. Matthew 5:27-28:

*"<sup>27</sup> 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; <sup>28</sup> 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."*

We're to take this sin so seriously that Jesus says you need to take radical action and cut out anything in your life that is tempting you to fall into this sin. Matthew 5:29-30:

*"<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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."*

Now as I was studying this this week, I was interested to find there seems to be a common connection in the New Testament between the command to love the body well, to love one another in the body well, and the command to stay away from immorality. In fact, it's even here in Hebrews 13 in verse 1 he begins *let love of the brethren continue* and these other practices really all connect to ways we love the brethren and one of them is by having a high view of marriage and being certain that we do not defile the marriage bed

But there are other passages that seem to have a correlation between these two ideas. Ephesians 5:1-5:

*"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; <sup>2</sup> and walk in love, (there is is) just as Christ also loved you."* But then in verse 3 *"But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you"*

It goes on to explain in 1 Thessalonians 4 more of why sexual sin is a way of not expressing love to our brethren 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8:

*“3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion.”* And then he goes on in verse 6: *“6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things.”*

What he says is to sin in this way towards another believer is to defraud that believer, that is to exploit them, to use them for your own sinful advantage. It is the opposite of love that dishonors the covenant of marriage, it defiles the marriage bed. And so here is the application in a nutshell as we put all of this together. Corporately we are to be a people who are marked by the love of Christ and marked by our disdain for and rejection of worldly lust. Both of those things. The world will know you are my disciples by your love and they will also know that we are his disciples because we honor marriage and we honor the marriage bed in the pursuit of purity.

He finishes this verse with a sober warning because for those who reject wholesale God's standard of sexuality and they create one of their own making, here is the result. He says *“for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”* This is the reason we should take this seriously and this is also the reason why I said it is not only pertaining to the sin of adultery but because he includes fornication which of course is the broader term for unmarried people engaging in those things. Adultery is married people engaging with others outside of their marriage covenant. But the point is any pursuit of the one flesh union outside of the confines of the covenant of marriage is a sin before the Lord that dishonors marriage and defiles the marriage bed.

And the judgment here, while there are there are temporal consequences even for believers, believers are not immune unfortunately from sexual sin. They do give in at times to sexual sin, certainly they're tempted towards it and at times stumble into it and there are temporal consequences that come with that sin though our eternal consequences are washed away in Christ.

But I believe this is referring not to that but to those who reject wholesale God's commands for sexuality as unbelievers and pursue sexual sin for them they will know the eternal judgment of God. And we see this all throughout the scriptures Galatians 5:19:

*“19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, (he lists immorality, impurity, sensuality, he goes on to list others and then in verse 21 he says “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Practice meaning as this is who they are, they're unbelievers they are defined by these things.

Revelation 21:8, after describing that believers who are washed in the blood of the Lamb will enter into this New Heaven and New Earth in verse 8:

*“8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons (that's the word here for sexual immorality) their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

But that leads us to a passage that helps us balance all of these things and that puts the gospel on display because listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 about these things beginning in verse 9:

*"9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."*

So why are we here then? Because I guarantee you we can point to things on that list that described who we were. Why are we here? Verse 11:

*"Such were some of you;"* (In the church. What happened to us?) *"but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified (declared righteous) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

This is the gospel, Christian. All of us have sinned. We can all point to things on that list and every other list that's given in the Bible of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God and yet the Bible says we have a sure hope of inheriting the kingdom of God. How does that work? It works because God has sent His only son to live the perfect life that all of us so miserably failed to live. He did it. He kept it all and then He gave His perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross to pay for all of our sins. All of them. The worst sins you've ever committed, He paid for them all. For those who would put their faith in Jesus Christ, turning in repentance from their sin to the Lord Jesus Christ, He says they're washed away. Such were some of you.

This is the good news of the gospel. And we cannot talk about these things and the weight of them without also bringing in the good news of the gospel because some of you are here this morning and the truth is, you're beaten down by sexual sin. It has its hooks in you. You're weighed down with guilt and shame over your sin and thinking, oh if anyone really knew the kind of thoughts that I struggle with, the kind of things that have come out of my mouth, the things I've done, they would disown me. They wouldn't want me here in this place.

Listen friend, if you've come into this place and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ and you're thinking, I obviously don't belong here because I'm the things on that list, there's One who knows all of your thoughts, who knows all of your words, who knows everything you have ever done. The things that you hope no one will ever find out, He knows them all. And you know what He says to you? He says come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He says come repenting of your sin and know forgiveness, be washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the good news of the gospel!

And as I said before, some of you are not dealing with the fact that you're an unbeliever who needs to repent for the first time, but you're a Christian, and the truth is you're still struggling with sexual sin. Many do. What do you do? You come and ask for help. You cry out to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will not only forgive you of that sin, it's already been covered by the blood of Christ if you're in Christ, but the gospel also comes with the power now to be sanctified in the process of sanctification so that you can begin to walk in the newness of life that is yours.

So come and ask for help. But stop believing the lie that sexual sin can't be defeated. That's not the gospel. Jesus paid the price for our sin and then filled us with His spirit and gave us His word and He says we have all that we need for life and godliness, so trust Him and begin to walk in the newness of life that is yours in Christ.

So, as we begin to draw this towards a close and towards communion let me just give you two things to consider. Number one **Consider your view of marriage**. Consider your view of marriage. Has the world's view of marriage taken its toll on you? Have you begun to question God's good design for marriage?

Maybe it's not the megaphone of the world and its own ideas that has your attention. Maybe it's the difficulties you've experienced in your own marriage or the marriage of others that's got you questioning God's design for marriage. Brother, sister let me tell you as a pastor, I feel your pain. It is my privilege to walk with people through very hard things. I've heard very hard stories of things that have happened in marriages. But let me remind you as I remind myself, the issue is not an inherent problem with marriage. Again, it is sin. Identify the right problem and then identify the right solution.

Christ has come to help us with our sin, to forgive us, and to free us from our sin. And let that be a fresh wind of encouragement to you in your own marriage and as you help others in their marriages. Don't give up on marriage. It's worth fighting for. Even the sin of adultery can be overcome by God's grace, with much work, with much effort, but it can be done, restoration can be had, even in these difficult situations.

But number two **Consider your commitment to purity**. Consider your commitment to purity. The truth is, none of us are perfect. I'm not saying are you walking in perfection when it comes to purity, but I am saying as a Christian, can you honestly say that your life by definition is characterized by the pursuit of purity in thought, in word, in word and in deed? Think about your entertainment. What are you taking in? Are you entertaining yourself with things that are not pure, whether it's books or movies or social media? What are you allowing into your mind?

If you're single but you're dating or engaged, how careful are you to guard your own purity and to guard the purity of the one you're dating? Are you guarding the marriage bed even as you date someone? You have standards that you're walking by. Can you honestly say that the way that you pursue purity demonstrates that you have a high regard for marriage and a high regard for the marriage bed?

And if you're struggling with these things, again, ask for help. Don't believe the lie that you can't come and talk to us about these things. We're here to help you as shepherds and pastors. This is what we want to do. Come to us if you're struggling with these things. But don't live another day bound to that sin. That's how we need to apply this individually.

But what about corporately? Very quickly, how do we corporately apply this call to purity? I was thinking about that and I was reminded of the 10th commandment. You remember the 10th commandment is *thou shalt not covet* and then he goes on to give a description of the

kinds of things we ought not to covet and on that list, one of them, is *do not covet your neighbor's wife*. We could say spouse. We ought not to covet our neighbor's spouse. How does that happen? How does that happen in the church?

Well often it doesn't begin initially with sexual sin and sexual temptation. Adultery is a sin that often springs from something else and often it is the sin of discontentment and bitterness. When you allow bitterness and discontentment to run rampant in your heart towards your spouse about the condition of your marriage or about something in them that you wish would change that isn't changing and you harbor that bitterness and discontentment it now opens you to think things like this.

You're talking to another couple after church and something happens and the wife thinks huh, wish my husband was godly like that guy or the husband says huh, I wish my wife looked at me like she looks at him. We begin to compare and contrast our spouse and our marriage and we build discontentment and bitterness in our hearts and if we don't kill that we open ourselves up to a gateway of other sins.

So how do you kill bitterness and discontentment? You clothe yourself in gratitude. Think not on the shortcomings of your spouse but on the things you most appreciate about them. Fill your mind with gratitude for the gift that God has given you in your spouse, with all their imperfections. That doesn't mean there's not times in which we must talk with our spouse about things that are not going well. It doesn't mean you can't lovingly confront your spouse, but it does mean don't spend your day constantly thinking about the things that are the shortcomings of your spouse or you will find yourself bitter and discontent, but fill your mind with lovely thoughts of Christ and of them. Kill the discontentment. And many times it staves off even the possibility of those other things.

Lastly, I want to commend to you something that's helped me a lot in this regard of a corporate application. I don't know for how long or when I began, but for years I have prayed the spirit of these two verses on my way to church. 1st Timothy 5:1-2 is Paul gives instruction to Timothy on how he's to treat the different members of the body and he says this:

*"Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity."*

I just pray through every category of believer that I'm going to encounter on the way to church and how God calls me to treat them. God help me with older men to treat them respectfully and humbly and be careful with how I speak to them. May I be kind and honorable in my speech with older women. God help me to treat them as spiritual mothers in Christ, to be gracious and kind to them. With young men, God help me to be selfless and humble in my communications. With women, treat them as sisters in all purity. It helps me remember what's happening here on Sunday is we're coming together to the family of God.

What's awaiting me when I get there are brothers and sisters in Christ, and that's how I must think of them. That's how I must speak to them. That's how I must treat them. And it

helps me to set my heart right, to walk into this place hopefully each week and to love people well.

So I commend that to you as a practice if it would be helpful to you. But by whatever means you use to renew your mind, by God's grace may we individually and corporately be a church that's marked and known by the love of Christ and by disdain for the lust of the world.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus this is our prayer. We ask that You would help us by Your grace in these things, help us to honor marriage. Pray for those among us who are in difficult marriages, maybe discouraged in their marriage, that God You would encourage them today to keep fighting, that it's worth the fight for a good marriage, a faithful marriage. It can be had in Christ .

I pray for those who are single and longing to be married and may be discontent with their current status in life that You would comfort their hearts, that You would fill them with the knowledge of your grace, and that You would strengthen them to use this time of life as a way of serving You and until it would please you to provide for them in that way and help us all God to walk in purity in every area of our life. It's in Christ's name we pray Amen.