

Uphold the Supremacy of Christ Over All Things:
Honor Marriage and Sexuality
Hebrews 13:4

Text:

Hebrews 13:1-9

Let brotherly love continue. 2Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. 4Let marriage be held in honor among all, and the let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. 5Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for the he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" 7Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Introduction:

I gave you my introduction in written form two weeks ago. For the sake of review, and in case some were not here to receive it, let me reiterate a few things.

These nine exhortations are being brought forward as very practical ways that new covenant promises affect real-life believers. This is where Christianity is lived – true commitment to Christ means carrying out faithfulness in the nitty-gritty of life. Beds and bank accounts cannot be separated from one's commitment to Christ. The way we live behind the closed doors of bedrooms or boardrooms says as much as anything about the supremacy of Christ.

Therefore, I think there are two reasons these nine commands, which can be summarized into four categories: relationships, sexuality, money, and leadership, appear precisely here at the end of twelve chapters of Christ's supremacy:

First, they stand-out as real expressions of heartfelt worship. We are meant to ask some hard and searching questions of our hearts:

- How can I manifest the supremacy of Christ over my relationships?
- How am I to worship the supremacy of Christ in marriage and sexuality?
- How do I demonstrate the supremacy of Christ over money?
- What will my commitment to Christ look like in my treatment of leadership?

Second, these categories stand-out as the areas in life where believers need the most help from the body. These are the areas we are most inclined to be blinded, deceived, hardened, and found drifting. We are meant to ask some hard questions of each other:

- Do you ever feel pressures that threaten in areas of leadership, submission, marriage and other relationships?
- Do you ever feel pleasures that beckon in areas of sexuality or money?

So to this end, I want to treat them each topically. The command of Hebrews shouts forth: “Uphold the supremacy of Christ over all things!”

“How?”

“Honor marriage and sexuality!”

Hebrews 13:4

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

There are several things to be pointed out about the words of this verse. For instance, the word for “marriage bed” is the Greek word *koite*, from which we get the English word *coitus*. This means that v.4 could be translated, “Let marital coitus be honored and kept pure.” Or, “Sex in marriage is to be honorable and pure.” Clearly, you and I are to uphold the supremacy of Christ in sexuality. Or, more to the point, we are to honor marriage in our sexuality. That means the way every individual (whether married or single) approaches his/her sexuality says something of their regard for marriage.

Honor Sex in Marriage

Next, we go to the word “honor.” What does it look like to honor something? Webster’s Dictionary defines *honor* as showing respect or esteem. While that may be true, the Greek word behind the English of *honor*, has the notion of holding something in high esteem due to its worth or value. I would translate it as “to regard it as precious.” Sex in marriage is to be regarded as precious.

Nothing possesses value in a vacuum. There must be some **ground**, some reason, for esteeming something as valuable. Usually, that which makes a thing valuable is the story that goes with it. Furthermore, what is valuable to one person might not be valuable to another – visit a garage sale! But certain things are so precious they are valued by all. (Life is arguably the most precious possession of earth.)

Two principles have emerged here:

- (1) Universal – Some things are so precious, they are honored by all;
- (2) Rationale – All precious things are valued for a reason.

The idea behind these two principles is simple to see: the deeper the rationale for a thing’s worth, the more universal will be its esteem. The best story will attract the largest audience – visit an *Antique’s Road Show*!

When the Bible says the kinds of things that Hebrews 13:4 says: “Let marriage be held in honor among all,” the first legitimate response should be, “Why? What makes marriage so precious that it should be universally esteemed?” What is the story behind it?

Here is where I want to bring caution. Christians usually like to reason using law: “The reason marriage is to be held in honor is because God said so. There are commands in Scripture that make it clear: marriage is for sex and sex is for marriage. Keep sex in marriage and you will be obeying God and honoring marriage.” That may be true, but reasoning with law will never convince our teenagers to stay pure. In fact, it may have the opposite effect (study Romans 7 and the “wet-paint” syndrome of humanity). But more to the point, it is impossible to reason with law. That is to say, throwing up command after command in the face of a lusting teenager is not reasoning for the value of marriage. The commands of Scripture (“law” in any form) do not exist as a rationale for anything being precious; they exist to protect (to **guard**) what is precious.

Imagine, for example, that you took your children to see the Crown Jewels of England. Once you arrived at the tower and made your way down into the lower levels and onto the moving sidewalk with all the other people, you saw the jewels behind the glass. There they were, perfectly lit so as to enhance their beauty. But all around you were signs of their value: armed guards, bullet-proof glass, light sensors, smoke detectors, surveillance cameras, and the like. Your child asks of you, “Daddy, why are these jewels so heavily guarded?”

You reply by saying, “Because they are precious.”

“But what makes them so precious?” is the comeback.

You respond with all the authority you can muster, “Because they need to be protected, Son!”

Your son scratches his head for a minute wondering why that answer didn’t satisfy his curiosity and tries asking it again, but differently, “Daddy, but why do they have to guard them?”

Your response is equally profound, “Because the queen said so, Son!”

That conversation has all the ingredients of a bad Abbot and Costello routine, doesn’t it?

“Son, I want you to stay pure until marriage!”

“Why, Dad?”

“Because God has commanded you to keep sex in marriage as pure and precious?”

“But what makes sex precious, Dad?”

“Can’t you see all the commands in the Bible? They exist to keep marriage honorable?”

“But why is marriage to be honored?”

“Because God said so.”

The signs that exist – the guards, the glass, the gates – only point to the reality that a thing is precious; but they don’t tell the story. Similarly, the commands of Scripture are only signs that exist – the guards, the glass, the gates – because marriage is valuable. They do not tell the story. Do not try to reason with your teens by using law. They will only rebel. Tell them the story!

Here is how I envision the story being told to Brice and Owen ...someday!

“Dad, why is marriage to be honored?”

“Well, son, there is something very important that you need to know. You and I were created by God as sexual beings. All the feelings you have when you see a pretty girl, all the questions you wonder about – ‘What will she feel like if I touch her’ or ‘why do I want to touch her?’ – are drives (powerful urges and feelings) put in us by God.

Now, Son, you need to know two things: (1) you need to know why those urges exist – why God made us sexual creatures; and (2) you need to know how to respond and carry out those sexual urges in a way that honors God’s design! Are you ready? (Of course not, you’re only 46!)”

Here are the two things they will need to know: the grounding (tell them the story) and the guarding (set the guidelines).

Ground Marriage

Everything precious has a story. That is, there are profound reasons for something having value. The reasons are the ground upon which the value rests. Our children and our own marriages need to be grounded in the reality of sex.

Why did God create us as sexual creatures? How is our sexuality different from the animal kingdom? Is our sexuality different from the animal kingdom? Is our sex-drive nothing more than raw animal instinct? The world says it is; the Bible says its not.

I like what Ben Patterson says, “The Bible is a book about marriage and sexuality” (49). He demonstrates that at the beginning there was a marriage and sexuality (Gen. 2:23-25) and at the end there is a marriage in Revelation 19:6-7, 9; 21:2. In fact, as you read the Bible in its entirety you get the impression that the one marriage between a man and a woman is only typological to the marriage at the end between Christ and his church. After all, doesn’t Jesus say that in heaven we will neither be married nor be giving in marriage? Why would He say that unless it is true that once you have the reality, you know longer need the picture?

So both the beginning and the end of the Bible are about marriage. Furthermore, all of the central themes in the Bible are underlined with a marriage metaphor, whether that theme is covenant, salvation, church, etc.

Marriage and sexuality are only pointers to something far greater. Marriage and sex are nothing more than real-life metaphors.

I am convinced that John Piper has hit the nail on the head when he writes this:

“...His goal in creating human beings with personhood and passion was to make sure that there would be sexual language and sexual images that would point to the promises and pleasures of God’s relationship to his people and our relationship to him. In other words, the ultimate reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable (26).

God created us with sexual passion so that there would be language to describe what it means to cleave to him in love and what it means to turn away from him to others” (28).

Did you ever stop to question why idolatry in the OT is spoken of in terms of adultery and whoredom? Is that because God is speaking in anthropomorphism? Is God adapting his message to our nature or did he create our nature so that there might be language for speaking of loving and knowing him?

Remember that “knowing” someone in the fullest biblical sense is defined by sexual imagery. I like the way Patterson gets at this point. “When Adam knew his wife (Gen. 4:1) what happened? Did he gather information? No. She got pregnant” (56-57).

Recall the words of the Gospel writer: “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son” (Matt. 1:24-25).

Piper continues, “Sexual language in the Bible for our covenant relationship with God does lead us to think of knowing God on the analogy of sexual intimacy and ecstasy” (31). When we say that God is our exceeding joy, we can know what that means experientially.

The prophetic books make this connection between knowledge, sexuality and God crystal clear.

Hosea 2:14-16, 19-20

That cannot mean anything other than sexual language. This knowledge cannot be reduced to a mere mental awareness. This is the language of a lover. (Could it be that we sell God short even in the way we evangelize? We have churches full of people who know God mentally but who do not know God intimately.) I love the phrase that Geoff Volker introduced us to when he spoke of New Covenant children of God as “incurable God lovers.”

Marriage and sexuality are God’s gift to us for painting a real-life metaphor for understanding what it means to love God.

“Son, do you understand why God made us sexual creatures? He wants you and me to know him. He wants you to be as driven in your knowledge of him as you are driven for sexual gratification (I could go to 1 Cor. 7:5 and the purpose of fasting from sex in marriage). But now son, you also need to know how to respond to your urges and drives.”

Guard Marriage

There is absolutely nothing wrong with placing commands around sex, just as it is perfectly fitting to place guards, glass and gates around the Crown-Jewels of England. There will be those who will want to break-in and steal or corrupt. Stand guard. But guard the heart not just the flesh.

The number one way we will honor marriage and guard our sexuality, men, is by purposing to keep sex in its proper place as a metaphor for knowing God. Sex belongs to the categories of intimacy. Men you will guard your own sexuality when you see it as an element of knowing your wife. **Men need to hear this principle - Develop intimacy.**

If I were to say to you, “Honor marriage by developing intimacy,” what do you suppose I mean? What is the single most important element for cultivating intimacy?

Cabernet and hot-tubs?

Candles and lingerie?

What would it be if I were addressing your walk with God? It would not be cabernet or candles; Sex has to do with knowledge. **The single most important element necessary for developing intimacy is communication!**

Here is where I would love to have two hours to speak just with the men – no women allowed. But since I don’t have that opportunity, let me give you **one rule** from C.J. Mahaney, “In order for [intimacy] to deepen, you must touch the heart and mind of your wife before you touch her body” (155).

Before you touch her body; touch her heart and mind.

If we would honor the principle of intimacy and communication and keep this simple rule, we would not need to resort to the mechanisms of champagne, hot tubs, lingerie, role playing, fantasizing and a whole host of weak and empty stimulants.

Without intimacy, there is only animal sex, not godly human sex. Stop defining intimacy with intercourse unless by *intercourse* you mean serious communication that culminates with a bang!

Women, the number one way you will honor marriage and sexuality is with modesty. In fact, many men and women need to begin communication by having husband’s and father’s start talking to their wife and daughters about the clothes they wear. Men, talk to your women. Tell them when they are immodest.

Ten Questions Governing Modesty: (developed from questions by John Piper)

1. Can she go out in public dressed like that without being shamed?
2. Does the way she is dressed dispose men to think of women not as persons but as sexual objects, thinking only in terms of their bodies?
3. Will the way she is dressed stimulate sexual desires in men who could not legitimately carry out that desire?
4. Does her dress make sensibility look calloused?

5. Does her dress demonstrate that she measures her attractiveness and worth by the unrealistic standard of models?
6. Does her dress feed an unhealthy interest for fantasy by lodging sexual images in a man's mind?
7. Does her dress condone the proclivity of males to mentally unclothe women by reminding them what they would see if they did?
8. Does your dress feed the misguided notion that women want to be unclothed publicly in this way?
9. Does her dress indicate that she is putting excessive focus on her body and how she will be seen and accepted?
10. Does her dress contribute to the dissatisfaction in men whose wives cannot produce that body?

Conclusion:

Church, we are not animals. We are men and women created in the image of God so that we might know him. Oh that we would know God in a way that parallels and flows from the metaphor of sexuality and marriage. Oh that we may know him with an intensity and an intimacy that matches the ecstasy of sex. Do you know God like that? Does your sexuality fit that goal?