

Honoring Marriage
Hebrews 13:4
6/16/96

The news article, from about a month ago, read:

"Nearly 200 homosexual couples - some in drag, others in traditional wedding garb - last Monday held hands before an only-happy-to-oblige-you Willie Brown, the new mayor of San Francisco.

"Twenty couples at a time walked the aisle to Mr Brown and said among other things: "We pledge, while in this union, to be responsible to each other and to be committed to a relationship of loyalty and mutual caring."

"Then a beaming Mayor Brown gave his city's official endorsement to the couples, among them two men in drag, wearing full nun's habits:(as the mayor intoned:) "I hereby pronounce you lawfully recognized domestic partners. You may consummate the relationship."

The cities of New York and Madison, Wisconsin also already allow same-sex marriage ceremonies.

The state of Hawaii has passed a law making same-sex marriages legal. That law is currently being reviewed by the Hawaii Supreme Court.

If that law is upheld, the constitution of the United States could make all other states recognize those same-sex marriages.

Many states, including Colorado have attempted to pass laws that would preempt that possibility -
passing laws that would specifically make opposite sex marriages the only lawfully recognized marriages in their states.

Colorado passed such a law but our Governor vetoed it in April.

Should homosexuals be allowed to be legally married?

On a different but related subject, is it actually wrong for a man and a woman who are unmarried to have sex?

According to some polls by 1991 as many as 70% of 20 year old

Americans had had sex - most of them were unmarried.
(Adolescence 26 (Fall 1991):631)

The arguments we hear most often are, "Well, we really love each other!"
Or "We are more committed to each other and love each other more than many married couples we know."

Or, "What difference does a marriage license, a piece of paper, make? I think we're already married in the eyes of God."

Others don't even use the arguments of "love" but simply state they can't imagine there being anything wrong with something that is so natural.

Is pre-marital sex actually wrong?

Let me raise a third, but also related subject: adultery.

Very few people seem to want to defend adultery - but it is surprising how many will commit it and rationalize their actions at least to themselves, even while calling themselves Christians.

Is adultery actually wrong or is it just socially tacky.

I have raised these issues this morning because the biblical text we are studying today addresses the larger issues of marriage and sex.

Today, we conclude our study of the book of Hebrews.

God, through the author of this letter, has been addressing a church - giving them instructions on maintaining their spiritual balance in the midst of the real and sometimes hard experiences of life.

They identified themselves as Christians in a world that was very hostile to Christianity.

The author wrote to encourage them and to challenge them to remain faithful to Jesus.

He began his encouragement of them by reminding them throughout the first several chapters of the letter that Jesus is truly superior to anything

they left behind when they became Christians.

He wanted them to know, beyond doubt, that Jesus is the only way to God - in no other way can their sins be forgiven, their relationship to God be restored, and their future be secured.

He wanted to be reassured that in spite of the persecution they faced, they were not foolish in trusting Christ Jesus.

And starting in the last half of chapter 10, the author uses several means to encourage them to persevere, to remain faithful BECAUSE it will be worth it all.

He gives them a picture of the future - of what will be - and says "look at that - fix your eyes firmly on Jesus and that future and you can hang in there - you can be a Christian in a very unChristian world.

Several times in several ways, in this letter, he has reminded them they are not living for the present.

This life is not all there is.

They are like pilgrims, living in this land, BUT PREPARING for a land to come. -Living this life but all the while preparing for the life to come.

He said it this way in Hebrews 13:14 "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for a city that is to come."

Please look in your Bible at Hebrews 13.

We find in this chapter of the letter, the author's concluding remarks.

If you are part of God's family, living not just for the present but truly following Christ and living with a future kingdom-perspective, then you will conduct yourselves differently than the world around you.

As we follow Christ and prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus there are some things the author says ought to characterize us.

In verse 1, of chapter 13, he puts those issues, he will address, under the heading of "loving one another."

"Keep on loving each other as brothers", he writes.

Then, in his concluding part of the letter, he spells out six ways, that love is to be expressed as we follow Christ and persevere as Christians until Jesus comes again.

#1 In V2 he instructs them to be gracious, to be hospitable to those they don't know.

#2 In V3 he tells them to remember to take care of Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith.

#3 in V4 we will come back to in a minute.

#4 In V5 he calls on them to be free of the love of money.

#5 In V7 and 17 he calls on them to obey and honor their spiritual leaders.

and #6 In V9 and following he reminds them not to go back to their former religious traditions and beliefs.

I introduced this message by raising the issues of homosexual marriage, premarital sex and adultery.

I did that because of the third subject God raises in this conclusion to Hebrews.

Look at V4: (don't read yet)

If you are going to be a Christ-follower, living not only for this life but living with the perspective that the Kingdom of God is more lasting and more important than anything that could happen here, then "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

This morning I will not attempt to speak to these issues in ways that would convince the unbeliever - the one who is not a Christian.

The unbeliever essentially says, "I don't care what the Bible says on these subjects - because the Bible is irrelevant."

The letter of Hebrews was not written to pagans in Rome but to the church.

The author was writing to people who believed in God and believed God - Who wanted to know what God thought.

Today I am not addressing those, even here, who judge the Bible by how they feel and what they want to do or what is currently politically or socially correct in the culture, BUT I am addressing people who judge their actions and the culture by what God says.

I am concerned that even in the church - even among those who truly are Christ-followers, there is confusion about what God says on the subjects I have raised.

This morning I want to show you again, from God's Word, what he does say on these subjects.

I want us to be very clear about what a Christ-follower believes and then how a Christ-follower acts in these matters.

I know it is very difficult to know exactly how to apply these truths in a world that doesn't believe - but it is imperative that we begin with us being clear on the truths.

God begins his instruction on marriage and sex with this exhortation:

"Marriage should be honored by all."

Or stated differently, "Let marriage be precious to all of you."

The marriage relationship is so fundamental to every society that to corrupt that relationship is to do fundamental damage to that society.

Even our own Supreme Court recognized this when many years ago while upholding biblical marriage as one man united to one woman they wrote: States must anchor their marriage laws in "the basis of the idea of the family, as consisting in and springing from the union for life of one man and one woman in the holy estate of matrimony; (Such a marriage) is the sure foundation of all that is stable and noble in our civilization, (marriage is) the best guaranty of that reverent morality which is the source of all beneficent progress in social and political improvement." (Murphy v Ramsey cited in World April 6, 1996)

Why should marriage be honored?

After America's fling in the 60s and 70s with every alternative imaginable, even the sociologists and psychologists have largely come back to an understanding that a stable home of a husband and a wife provides, hands down, the environment most conducive to the rearing of children.

There has been and there is no setting better for children than a strong marriage.

Not only should marriage be honored and precious to all of us because it provides the best place for children but if sex outside of marriage is wrong then practically speaking, marriage provides the only place for the propagation of the species.

Without marriage there will be no people.

A fairly practical benefit of marriage if sex and marriage go together.

But marriage should be honored by Christians also because we know God has said that marriage, the relationship between a husband and a wife illustrates the relationship of God with his people.

In Ephesians 5 God says that the love of a man and a woman in marriage best illustrates God's love for us.

There is no greater symbol of the relationship of Christ to his church than the marriages of God's people.

A godly marriage, in essence, communicates significant elements of the gospel.

"Marriage should be honored by all."

Not just by married people - but by all.

After making that resounding affirmation of marriage, God then gets very specific:

"The marriage bed (should be) kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and the all the sexually immoral."

The sentence is very clear, one thing that will dishonor marriage and clearly break the command of God is if the marriage bed is not kept pure.

What is meant by the term "the marriage bed"?

Obviously it is an euphemism for the sexual relationship.

For marriage to be honored as God has commanded, the sexual relationship between people must be kept pure.

In the right context, sex is right, pure, and holy - God honoring.

But clearly implied is, that it is altogether too possible for the marriage bed, the sexual relationship between people to be IMPURE - unholy, dishonoring to God, dishonoring to marriage.

The verse goes on to say exactly what is dishonoring and impure:

"for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

Now we are down to the nub of it - "What does God say about the issues I raised earliest in this message?:"

What about adultery?

Does any Christian misunderstand God's law and will regarding that issue? It doesn't get much clearer than, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" .

Any married person having sexual relations with any one or any thing other than their own spouse is committing adultery.

And Jesus said, "You have heard it said, Do not commit adultery' but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Immediately after which he tells us to be ruthless in guarding our hearts in this matter - for as he says it, "it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

God is serious about this matter of adultery.

It violates marriage, it violates God's law, it violates God.

I could spend much more time, and I have on other occasions, giving

much more evidence for the catastrophic effects of adultery BUT for the Christ-follower, it is enough to know what God commands EVEN if we don't know why.

Clearly adultery is wrong but what about homosexual conduct and premarital sex.

Look at V4 again. Who else will God judge besides the adulterer?

"The sexually immoral."

The sexually immoral dishonor marriage.

Many of you know the Greek word that is here translated "sexually immoral" is a word that covers a whole range of sexual sins.

So what does God prohibit, what is included in these words: "sexual immorality"

Do you have any doubt about what God says about homosexual conduct?

Please find Romans 1 in your Bible. (Don't read yet)

As you look for Rom 1, listen to Leviticus 18:22 "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is repugnant to God."

As far back as the time of Abraham and Lot, men in the city of Sodom asked Lot, "Who are the men who came to visit you - bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

And Lot correctly denied them calling it for what it was and said, "No, don't do this wicked thing."

In Romans 1:21 we read: For although they knew God, people neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

V24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

V26 "God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even women exchanged natural relations for the unnatural ones. In the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other

men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

And as in the Hebrews' passage, so in I Corinthians 6 God says, "...The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God - homosexual offenders will not inherit the kingdom of God."

I know there has been a great deal of printer's ink used in trying to get these verses to mean something else - but even most unbelievers fully admit what the Bible says about homosexual relations - they just don't care what God thinks.

But the believer - the one is a Christ-follower - wants to know what God thinks.

Three years ago, I devoted an entire sermon to this subject - the Christian's response to homosexuality and the homosexual.

But as to homosexual marriages, (which is a contradiction in terms) isn't God's word clear enough already? Homosexual relations are forbidden by God.

Throughout the Scriptures, marriage is reserved for a man and a woman - no exceptions.

And it is our God-given obligation and our social-cultural responsibility to uphold that standard in every way we can with love and grace.

Whether the world believes it or not, we know that homosexual relations are not only anti-God's law but are anti-human.

And we will use whatever persuasive and legal means we have to maintain the place of marriage and sex in marriage as being between a man and a woman.

I intentionally saved, for last, the issue that is most violated even by people who claim to be Christians.

In Hebrews 13:4 God says he will judge the sexually immoral.

Are sexual relationships between unmarried people - immoral, sin?

To the non-Christian the answer to that question is irrelevant BUT to the Christ-follower that answer is very important!

Again, I am not addressing the people who don't care what God thinks.

I'm addressing the people who are looking for a different city and country than the one in which we live - I'm addressing those who are following Christ to a Kingdom that he will bring with him when he returns again.

What God thinks matters to us!

Is pre-marital sex or sex outside of marriage wrong?

Please look with me at I Cor 7.

In verse 1 Paul wrote that in light of the circumstances surrounding the church in Corinth "It is good for a man not to marry." or literally it reads, "it is good for a man not to touch a woman"

"Touching a woman" is a euphemism here for sex.

Why do some translators say "it is better for a man not to marry"?

Because as we will see in a moment - in God's thinking marriage is the only context in which sex is legitimate.

But back to the text - given your circumstances, it is good for a person not to have sex.

To continue, Look at V2 "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

What does Paul say they are to do to avoid immorality?

Get married.

Look at V8 "Now to the unmarried and the widows"

Anybody besides the married omitted here?

No, this instruction is to all single people - highschoolers, college age, older singles, never married, formerly married, widowed - anyone not now married.

"It is good to stay unmarried as I am. BUT if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Of course there are a lot of other issues raised by the words of Paul here, but stick to the main point - what does he say about sex?

If you can't or won't go without sex then you must get married.

Why? What is the clear implication?

Sex without marriage is "immorality".

Back in chapter 6, using the specific example of prostitution, God's word says, in v13, that our bodies were not made for sexual immorality.

In V16 he says, "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?"

V18 "Flee from sexual immorality".

Only the most obtuse would say that verse applies to prostitution only.

Honestly, in context, isn't it clear - sexual relationships outside of marriage are called immoral - they are sin against the will and Word of God?

Now I know that begs the question "What is marriage?"

Even if we agree that casual sexual encounters are immoral what about when a man and a woman truly love each other and are committed to each other?

Can sex in that situation be wrong?

More and more adults, even many who claim to be Christians, are living together, or otherwise engaging in sex, and want to believe there is nothing wrong with it.

Some will claim God has not prohibited it.

Their logic apparently goes something like this:

"If we love each other and are committed to each other then we are

married in God's eyes. And if we are married in the eye's of God then sex is right because sex in marriage, we have seen, can be pure and holy not impure and immoral."

So again the question, "What is marriage according to the Bible?"

In Malachi 2:14 God calls the marriage relationship a Covenant!
Divorce was the breaking of a covenant agreement.

To be a covenant relationship, and remember marriage is a covenant relationship, certain things were required:

1. There had to be a stated promise with specific intentions., not unstated and unspecific, but a stated, specific commitment made - those are vows, promises..

It is not a covenant, not a marriage if there is not a specific and stated vow of commitment, of promise.

"Assumed" commitment doesn't qualify as a covenant and marriage is a covenant.

2. But secondly for it to be a covenant there had to be the intention of permanence.

Yes, covenants were broken but that very word "broken" indicates the intention of covenants - they were to be permanent.

When Jesus spoke to the subject of marriage he harkened back to the very beginning - to Genesis itself, in stating what marriage is intended to be by God.

He said, "A man shall leave his father and mother and shall be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. ..Therefore what God has joined together let man not separate."

The word "united" that Jesus used (also translated "cleave") means to be permanently bound to.

Many, if not all men and women who "live together" without being married -

are avoiding this very attribute of a covenant.

Apparently, it is fear of permanence - fear of commitment- that makes them avoid the covenant making ritual of marriage.

3. But thirdly for it to be a covenant there had to be witnesses.

Covenants were witnessed or attested to by others - those who could later say "yes" or "no" that was or wasn't part of the covenant.

A private covenant is an oxymoron.

Without witnesses there is no covenant.

The private commitment between a man and a woman doesn't biblically qualify as a covenant of marriage.

And in the Scriptures all covenants are made intentionally before God.

If God is not called as both witness and Lord of the covenant then there is no covenant.

Back to Jesus' description of marriage in Mt 19 - what did he say was God's part in the marriage?

"What God has joined together let man not separate."

It is illogical and wrong to call it a marriage if the living arrangement contradicts the clear teaching of God's own word.

In a marriage - God does the joining.

By the authority God vests in governments, even the marriages of unbelievers are sanctioned by God.

4. And fourthly with covenants there were ceremony, ritual, and symbols connected to the commitments being made.

Usually a religious sacrifice was made, or a gift was given, or a symbol was made or set up to remind everyone of the covenant that was made.

In the Scriptures, when marriages are begun, there are dowries, parties, specific actions that symbolize the covenant made.

Sexual intercourse itself is one of the signs of the covenant, the union, the marriage.

And sex outside of that marriage covenant is a dishonoring of marriage, it is a cheapening of all that the covenant of marriage stands for - and it is a direct contradiction of the will of God.

The Bible is clear - marriage is not just an unstated agreement between two people - it is a COVENANT between a man and a woman.

And Covenants are stated, they are specific, they are permanent, they are public, and they are solemnized with ceremony and symbol.

And the covenant of marriage is to be honored by all people.

And specifically, any sex outside of that marriage covenant is dishonoring to marriage and directly contrary to the stated will of God.

Those who claim to be Christ-followers don't have to wonder what God thinks about the issues of adultery, homosexuality or premarital sex - he is quite clear.

Prayer

Prayer Hall

Benediction