

Text: Heb. 13:4

Title: "Honor marriage"

Time: 8/28/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – 50th wedding anniversaries are special times. My son had the opportunity to be a part of the celebration of his girlfriend's grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary celebration this past summer. As Brandon and Carey pray about God's will for their future together, I am very thankful for the example that they have in Don and Judy, Carey's grandparents. It was at my parents' 50th wedding anniversary that my mom's symptoms of dementia first began to become apparent to many of us, so that time of joy and celebration for us has a sad side as well, but it was still a wonderful and joyous occasion. A golden wedding anniversary is a special time when we remember to honor marriage.

Many of the sitcoms on TV are about homes and families and marriages. What gives them great ratings and makes them funny to our culture is, in part, the way that they dishonor God's design for marriage. The Supreme Court of our land dishonored marriage this past year by striking down righteous marriage laws in a number of states. Marriage is in great peril in our land today.

But our author was likely most concerned about some Christian marriages among believers when he wrote the verse we have before us this morning, and with modern social-networking and entertainment technologies at our fingertips, we should be even more concerned in that regard today. Divorce is much more common among professing believers than it used to be in our land.

I had lunch with a new acquaintance, a brother in the Lord, who told me of a case he knew of, where a pastor recently resigned his pastorate, divorced his wife, and quickly married another lady in the congregation. That church is now looking for a new pastor. Our church has experienced that circumstance in the past, and should I or those who come after me fail to hear and heed the powerful words of this passage, it will happen again. Our world needs the truth that marriage is honorable. Our hearts need it too.

That truth requires action from us. The truth that marriage is honorable implies a command that we desperately need to obey today. The command is, "Honor marriage," and our author gives us three reasons for doing so.

I. Honor marriage because it is honorable in every way (*in all*).

III: In the spring of 1523, nine nuns escaped a convent in Germany and fled to the Reformer Martin Luther's Wittenberg for safety and sustenance. One of these ladies was Catharina von Bora, whom one historian describes as "not remarkable for beauty or culture, but healthy, strong, frank, intelligent, and high-minded" [Schaff, 7.456]. At 24 years of age, she was 15 years younger than the Reformer Luther, but she would soon become Luther's wife.

The marriage of Martin and Catharina was a monumental event in church history. Since the pronouncement of Pope Gregory VII in the 11th century, it had been an act of lewdness for a Roman Catholic clergyman to take a wife. Church historian Philip Schaff explains the significance of Luther's marriage this way: "By taking to himself a wife, he wished to please his father, to tease the Pope, and to vex the Devil. Beneath was a deeper and nobler motive, to rescue the old-

est ordinance of God on earth from the tyranny of Rome, and to vindicate by his own example the right of ministers to the benefit of this ordinance. Under this view, his marriage is a public event of far-reaching consequence. It created the home life of the evangelical clergy" [Schaff, 7.455].

Appl: I, for one, am thankful that he did so. Luther lived in a day when someone needed "to rescue the oldest ordinance of God on earth from . . . tyranny." We live in a day like that, and so we too must honor marriage by understanding all the ways that it is honorable. I want to mention three this morning.

1. Marriage is honorable in its covenantal picture. Marriage is both a covenant and a type, or a symbol, or a picture. Every type has an antitype – simply what the picture symbolizes. The covenant of marriage between a husband and a wife is a picture that symbolizes the covenant between Jehovah and Israel and Jesus and the church.

In the Old Testament, we read that the wife is the helper of the husband, and we also read that Jehovah is the helper of His people. We read that Jehovah betrothed Israel as his own wife, that she was unfaithful to Him, but that He loved her with an everlasting love.

In Jesus Christ, Jehovah became a man, and a new people of God was established on the earth – His church. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Wives are to follow their husbands as their head like the church is to follow her head, Jesus Christ.

In the Revelation passage we read this morning, these truths of Israel and the church come together at the con-

summation of God's plan for His people. Jesus, who is Jehovah, is the Bridegroom, the Lamb. His bride is the New Jerusalem, built with the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the church (Rev. 19:6-9). Every marriage between a man and a woman is designed by God to symbolize this wonderful reality – Jesus has entered a marriage covenant with His people that saves them from sin, purifies them for heaven, and gives them eternal life in His faithful love. In this way every marriage pictures the reality of the gospel. Do you have that relationship with Christ this morning?

2. Marriage is honorable in its unity.

Ill: Luther wrote the following of his marriage to Catharina: "Next to God's Word there is no more precious treasure than holy matrimony. God's highest gift on earth is a pious, cheerful, God-fearing, home-keeping wife, with whom you may live peacefully, to whom you may intrust [*sic*] your goods and body and life" [Schaff, 7.461].

Appl: Marriage was designed by God because it was not good for man to be alone. After his naming the animals, there was no helper found suitable for Adam. When God brought Eve to Adam, he 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" (Gen. 2:23).

The next verse speaks of God's institution of marriage: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Commenting on the nature of marriage in this Genesis passage, Jesus said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hat joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6). Marriage is honorable in its unity.

The apostle Paul tells us that this unity is manifested best in sacrificial love and humble submission (Eph. 5:23-29). Marriage is honorable in the responsibilities of each unifying part, responsibilities both of the husband and of the wife. The sacrificing love of a husband for his wife is honorable. The sweet submissiveness of a wife is honorable. The world is not convinced of these things, but we must be. Marriage is honorable in its unity. Does our marriage demonstrate this?

3. Marriage is honorable in its wedding ceremony.

Appl: Did you notice that the Revelation passage spoke not only of a *marriage*, but also of a *marriage-supper*, the wedding ceremony? In fact, the word translated *marriage* in our Hebrews verse (*gamos*) in every other context in the New Testament actually refers not to the life-long marriage per se, but to the wedding ceremony.

Our world has viewed wedding ceremonies with less honor as they have viewed marriage with less honor. This should not be the case with us. We have a constitutional amendment proposed and seconded and posted on our bulletin board downstairs that seeks to ensure that wedding ceremonies and receptions that are a part of the testimony of our church treat that ceremony as something honorable to the glory of Christ. I hope you are a member and that you vote for that amendment. Honor the wedding ceremony.

Transition: There is much more we could say about the honorability of marriage. A healthy marriage is critical to spiritually healthy children, and even a spiritually healthy world. God commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it” (Gen. 1:28). They were to do this as a married couple, a powerful team doing the will of the Lord together.

Do you and I honor marriage by recognizing all the ways in which it is truly honorable? Are we committed to making our marriages the blessing to us, our children, our church, and our world that God wants them to be?

II. Honor marriage because its bed is undefiled (*and the bed undefiled*).

III: After Luther married his wife, his Roman Catholic enemies suddenly felt that they had a new opportunity to heap reproach upon him. Schaff explains: "The event was a rich theme for slander and gossip. His enemies circulated a slander about a previous breach of the vow of chastity, and predicted that, according to a popular tradition, the ex-monk and ex-nun would give birth to Antichrist" [Schaff, 7.459].

Appl: The word *undefiled*, which describes the marriage-bed here, is a word that the author of Hebrews uses only twice. He uses it here and in 7:26, where the sinlessness of our Savior as our high-priest is described. The marriage-bed is undefiled, just like our sinless Savior is undefiled. We do not simply believe in matrimony, but in holy matrimony. I think I can say with authority that our passage teaches that there should be one bed per marriage, not two. I know that I can say that what God has designed for that bed is holy and undefiled.

III. Honor marriage because God shall judge sexual immorality (*God will judge*).

Appl: Societies' definitions of immorality change from generation to generation and from place to place, and today, from person to person. This is not true for the God who will judge the sin of man. His definitions of the two sins mentioned here have not changed: fornication is pursuing sexu-

al pleasure outside of the marriage relationship, and adultery is doing fornication while being married, and so breaking your marriage vow. Jesus taught us that these sins can be committed with our hearts and minds as well as with our bodies.

God's view of these things is not the view of the world from which you and I have been saved. In fact, the definitions that prevail in our society are very similar to the culture the church of Corinth faced in the first century. Paul spoke frankly with this church about their need to live lives that are clean from the defilement of sexual sin, and I think in 1 Cor. 6:15 - 7:2 he gives three admonitions for accomplishing that in a world like ours by God's grace.

1. Live pure by guarding your relationship with Christ (6:14-17; cp. Joseph in Gen. 39:9, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?").
2. Live pure by guarding your body, including your mind (vv. 18-20; Prov. 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life"). We must control our entertainment to keep our heart diligently: safe internet, filtered TV, godly music, godly friendships, avoiding physical contact, modesty in dress.
3. Live pure by guarding your marriage relationship (7:1-2). The joy of marriage is an important antidote for immorality. Bitterness can defile what God designed as undefiled (many were defiled by Esau's root of bitterness, Heb. 12:15; that word is the opposite of *undefiled*).

Conclusion: Perhaps most importantly of all, when it comes to victory over this kind of sin, remember what Christ has done for you as you fight this fight (6:9-11). You were a fornicator and adulterer, but now you are washed, sanctified, and justified. The blood of Christ is the wonder-working

power that enables us to live a pure life in a Corinthian culture to the glory of His name. The blood that washed us, sanctified us, and justified us, will wash our feet again each time we confess our sin to the Lord (1 John 1:7-9). In the name of the Lord Jesus and by the power of the Spirit of our God, "Honor marriage."

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching