

Keeping Marriage Good • Hebrews 13:4

Hebrews 13:4 tells us, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

What we have here is a call from God to both the single and the married, a call to make marriages good. That particular call comes in two parts. The first part speaks of the wonders of marriage: “Marriage should be honored by all.”

The Greek word that’s used here is the word “timios”. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is translated “honor”. Most of the time it is translated “precious” or “valuable”. For example, in James 5:7: “See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable (timios) crop.” Or in 2 Peter 1:3 and 4: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious (timios) promises.” And, most noteworthy of all, is 1 Peter 1:19 that refers to the timios blood of Jesus Christ, the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The Bible uses the same word to describe the harvest a farmer works so hard for, the promises that God has given to us, the blood of Jesus Christ and marriage – precious! God calls marriage good and valuable and honorable and precious, and we are to view marriage the same way God does.

When we rate things, we do it in terms of some type of value. We say that a house is worth a lot of money or that one day is better than another day and one type of weather is superior to another type. God is saying that when he rates things, marriage comes out with an incredibly high rating and that it is precious, or honored, by all. That sounds like it’s talking

about people. Actually, it’s not referring to people, it is referring to circumstances. It is saying that marriage is to be regarded as precious and honorable by or in all circumstances—every situation that you can imagine—good or bad, right or wrong. In every circumstance and situation, we as Christians are to elevate the value of marriage.

That means that before marriage, Christians must be committed to keeping marriage precious by our chastity. Does that sound outdated? In the Roman Empire, Christians were considered to be crazy because of their view toward morality. It was virtually a completely promiscuous society. But Christians lived by a different moral code, and eventually their moral code permeated the Empire.

We are to keep marriage precious by working to make it succeed. We do not take it for granted. We do not assume that marriage will automatically be good simply because someone said that it should be good. We will read books; we will pray for our marriages; we will show consideration to our husbands or wives. We will keep marriage precious.

When on a business trip and the opportunities for immorality are present, we will keep marriage precious. When we are tempted in the office by some man or some woman, we will keep marriage precious. In the stresses of home life when we think that we just can’t hang in there any longer, we’ll keep marriage precious. In the good times and the bad times, whether celebrating an anniversary or suffering through a separation, we will keep marriage precious. For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, God calls marriage an invaluable commodity, and we must do nothing to cheapen that which God calls precious.

In her book, *What Every Woman Ought to*

Happily married couples are all-around happier. They are healthier. They live longer. They are also better off financially.

Know About Marriage, Dr. Joyce Brothers says this:

Marriage is worth the effort. It is the most dependable source of happiness, security, and just plain well-being there is in today's world. Happily married couples are all-around happier. They are healthier. They live longer. They are also better off financially.

The wonderful thing about marriage is that you are the most important person in someone else's life. When the whole world seems to be rejecting you . . . you lost your job, whatever . . . you know there is someone who will not reject you.

Best of all, there is someone to share your happiness with. Marriage is the salt of daily life. It makes everything just a little bit better.

Do you know what God says about that? God shouts out his AMEN because God agrees that marriage is precious and therefore it must be protected.

Because God is extraordinarily concerned that this precious, honorable marriage relationship be protected from abuse and from intrusion, he goes on to say in the second part of verse 4 that “the marriage bed (should be) kept pure.” This refers to sexual intercourse and clearly declares that it is pure, wholesome, positive and esteemed - - - within marriage. It is also a dramatic reminder that no one should do anything that might defile that marriage bond.

It's a message to those of us that are married, that we are to keep our minds and our hearts and our hands and our bodies only for those to whom we are married. We must never do anything that will cheapen what God calls precious.

It's a message to those who are single to never tamper with the marriage relationship of others. Never say or do anything that will cause you to pollute the sexual bond of any married person, and resist any temptation of any married person to detract from their marriage by any relationship with you.

We must all do our parts to elevate marriage and make people's marriages good, even if they aren't our own marriages. As Christians, we must continually contribute to making marriage not only successful, but to keeping it protected.

Specifically, this refers to sexual relationships outside of marriage, but there is a broader principle that, whether married or single, we must support marriage, pray for marriage and encourage all marriages in every possible way. We dare not tempt anyone to infidelity by our dress, our language or potentially compromising situations and relations. We are to do all we can in our homes, in church, in our offices, on our business trips, in our neighborhoods, in our minds, to support and protect what God has called precious and in need of protection.

God knows that we are all sinners, and as sinners we have a bent toward breaking God's law, toward disobedience. As sinners we are tempted to stray away from marital fidelity; as sinners we are prone to flirt with other people; as sinners we find pleasure in the prospect of sexual relationships with those to whom we are not married. We are sinners and God recognizes that. And because God recognizes that, he goes on in this second part of Hebrews 13:4 to give us a powerful, but negative, warning. The warning is that “God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

Upon first reading that may seem to be repetitious, but actually there is quite a distinction between the adulterer and the sexually immoral. As bad as immorality may be, adultery is worse! The Old Testament punishments against adultery were far stronger than those against immorality. We have a commandment in the Ten Commandments against adultery, but not one against immorality!

Adultery is far, far more than a man or a woman having sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her wife or husband. Adultery is the breaking of a sacred vow. Adultery is the fracturing of a God-sealed relationship. Adultery is the breaching of a permanent con-

tract.

In our culture, we hold a contract to be very important. If you sign a contract to build a house or buy a car or sell a piece of real estate, you're bound to that contract and our court system will hold you to it. You must deliver on the terms of that contract. And, frankly, we don't think much of people who break contracts.

God is declaring that marriage is a sacred contract, one that he has sealed, and if that contract is broken, God counts it to be a most serious infraction. God says that adultery is more than a private matter between two people. Adultery is an affront to God. It is smashing what God calls precious and sacred. Adultery is a sin against God himself! God cannot and God will not allow such behavior to go unnoticed and unjudged.

The Greek word that's used for sexual immorality is "pornous" from which we get the word "pornography". It refers to all immorality and really has nothing specific to do with marriage. It has to do with anything that is sexually impure. It includes all homosexual activity. It includes premarital sexual relations. It includes extramarital sexual relations. It refers to the biblically forbidden practice of sexual relations between people and animal. It extends to lewd and provocative sexual behavior as well.

God doesn't like any kind of immorality. He invented human sexuality and sexual activity as a marvelous provision for appropriate human pleasure, and he resents sinners twisting and abusing what he invented.

Imagine a master artist painting a brilliant landscape and then seeing someone use it for a dartboard! Certainly the artist would be angry over the gross misuse of his masterpiece. God is the Master Artist who created the masterpiece of marriage and morality.

God judges the sexually immoral. He doesn't let people get away with it. Sooner or

later, in some way or another, the judgment of God comes upon the immoral. But God is not some kind of heavenly spoilsport, out to ruin human fun. He judges immorality because he is just and must judge what is wrong. Furthermore, he judges immorality in order to restrict if not stop it from recurring.

So what do we do with this?

We must not emphasize the end of the verse to the exclusion of the beginning of the verse. Frankly, if you are tempted to adultery or immorality, then take these warnings most seriously. Hear the warning and avoid the sin. If you are already involved in adultery and immorality, then stop! If you have been involved in an adulterous or immoral lifestyle, confess those sins and claim God's forgiveness. Do whatever you must do to make things right again – with God and with those whom you have wronged.

Jesus Christ has promised to give us the strength we need to live God's better way. Jesus Christ is the one to whom we go for the forgiveness of the sins that we have already committed. And Jesus Christ has promised us eternal life through faith in him.

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Most of all, commit to make marriage as good as God wants it to be. Count marriage as honorable and precious, something of fantastic value!

Work hard at making marriage good, whether it's your marriage or the marriages of others. Pray, read, think and talk in ways that show that "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge that adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

The result will be far more articles like one I read in the Minneapolis StarTribune. It's from the Associated Press datelined Orlando, Florida, July 5. It says:

Walter and Isabell Robison gave a lot of thought to their wedding date and finally settled on July 4, figuring they'd often have

the Independence Day holiday together. While others shot fireworks yesterday, they marked their 70th anniversary.

“It’s truly a storybook love story,” the Reverend Steve Ware said last week after the couple renewed their vows before about 100 other senior citizens. Robison held the hands of his 87-year-old bride at the Tabernacle Baptist Church and said: “I, Walter, take thee, Isabell, to be my lawful wife. And I promise before God and these witnesses that I will love you, honor you, cherish you, obey you and keep you in sickness and health.”

She repeated the oath to her 89-year-old bridegroom, a retired railroad worker.

It was in January 1914 when Robison, then 19, met Isabell, a 16-year-old with long, brown hair. They went for a sleigh ride in the countryside of Erie County, Pennsylvania. Six months later they decided to marry.

Communication is the key to a successful marriage, according to Isabell Robison. “We always try to sit down and talk over things. We didn’t get raffy and say things like ‘I hate you,’ ” she said.

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