

Let marriage be held in honour among all

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon at Poplar Baptist Church,

On 9th September 2017.

“Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” (Hebrews 13.4)

1. Introduction

This verse is very relevant to a wedding service. It gives a very important exhortation which Tolani and Abigail can apply to themselves as they set out in married life together: that they honour the institution of marriage that they have just entered. But the verse is not just for Tolani and Abigail. It says, “Let marriage be held in honour among all.” All of us, whether married or not, are to honour God’s institution of marriage. So I hope that all of us will pay very close attention to the Word of God, and hear what God is saying to us all today.

As we think about this verse, I want us to do so under three headings. Firstly, I want us to consider the call for us to honour marriage. Secondly, I want us to consider the call to let the marriage bed be undefiled. Thirdly, I want us to consider the reason that is given for us to do these things, that God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterous.

2. We are to honour marriage

Let us hear the first part of the verse: “Let marriage be held in honour among all.”

Through the inspired writer, the Holy Spirit is calling us all to honour marriage. How can and should we honour marriage?

1) We should honour God's definition of marriage

Marriage is clearly defined in the Bible as the joining of one man to one woman in a covenant, or an agreement, to be together, for life. The great foundation text for marriage, which is quoted by both Jesus and the apostle Paul, is Genesis chapter 2 and verse 24 which says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

This definition of marriage is coming under attack from many sides at the present time.

There are those who say that marriage is not necessary at all. They say that it is quite OK for man and woman to cohabit and have a sexual relationship without being married. But the Bible is very clear that there needs to be a public agreement, or covenant, between a man and a woman that they will be faithful to each other for the whole of their lives, before any sexual relations take place between them. Any sexual relationship outside of the covenant of marriage is sexual immorality, or fornication.

There are others who say that it is quite acceptable for a man to divorce his wife, and marry another woman, if the two find that they do not get on. But Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel chapter 19 and verse 9, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Jesus teaches that the only valid ground for divorce is the sexual immorality of the other party. Not getting on, or no longer being "in love" is not a valid reason for divorce, and a man who divorces his wife for such a reason and marries another is guilty of adultery.

There are others who say that marriage does not have to be between a man and a woman. They say that a man can marry a man, and a woman can marry a woman. But, the foundation text for marriage that we have just quoted clearly states that marriage is between one man and one woman. Sexual relations between a man and a man, or between a woman and a woman, are directly forbidden by God in the Scriptures.

If we are to properly honour marriage, we must live our lives according to these principles. Not only so, but we must uphold these principles before others. At the present time we are under a great deal of pressure to "go soft" on these things, and, for example, to recognise the so-called "marriage" of a man with a man. But if we are to obey the

command to honour marriage, we cannot condone practices that violate marriage as God has defined it. We are not to hate those who do things differently. We should love them and seek to show them that they are wrong. But we must not condone the wrong that they do, or support them in it. Otherwise we are disobeying this command to honour marriage.

2) We should honour marriage as a good and blessed state

The Bible warns that in the last days false teachers will arise. One of the marks of these false teachers is that they forbid some people to marry. Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 3 that such people “forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” This prophecy has been fulfilled, in that what is known as the Roman Catholic Church forbids what it calls its priests, monks and nuns to marry.

This is an attack on marriage. It implies that marriage is somehow dirty or bad, and that sex within marriage is sinful. But marriage is a holy thing. It was created by God and it is good. Sex is also good, having been created by God, as long as it is only practiced within the covenant of marriage.

So if we are to properly honour marriage we must reject the false teaching that forbids people to not marry.

3) The parents of those who are married should allow their married sons and daughters to conduct their own marriage relationships

Let me remind you of the foundation text for marriage, in Genesis, which says that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”. When a man marries his wife, he leaves his mother and father. It is very important that he does this, not just physically but also emotionally and in terms of how he organises his life. As a boy, it was right that he should obey his parents. But when he has grown up, and especially after he has married, he has become the head of a new household. He is still to honour his parents, but he should make his own decisions, in consultation with his wife, about how his household is to be run.

Similarly, the wife, once she is married, is to give her first loyalty to her husband. It is to him she should submit, and not to her parents.

Parents need to respect this. Many marriages struggle, and some fail, because of wrong interference by the parents or the in-laws. Parents should honour marriage by allowing their children, once married, to conduct their own lives without interference.

4) Those who are not yet married should honour marriage by abstaining from all sexual activity

Sex is a gift from God. There is nothing wrong with it when exercised within the covenant of marriage. Marriage is a life-long bond between a man and a woman. The “glue” that joins them together is sex. It is good for a man and his wife to have a strong and healthy sexual relationship. But God has made it absolutely clear that the practice of sexual relations should only take place between a man and his wife. The practice of sexual relations outside of marriage is what the Bible calls sexual immorality, or fornication.

If you are not married, and yet you engage in sexual relations with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you are showing contempt towards marriage. You are not honouring marriage. Not only are you hurting yourself and the person with whom you are having that relationship, you are also showing contempt for God and his holy law.

So those who are not yet married should honour marriage by abstaining from all sexual activity prior to marriage, and all proxy sexual activity through pornography. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, “Flee from sexual immorality.”

5) Those who are married should treat their spouses well

If you are married, and if you do not treat your spouse well, you are dishonouring marriage. If you behave in such a way as to make your spouse unhappy, or regret having married you, you will bring the institution of marriage into disrepute.

For husbands, this means that they should love their wives with the love that Christ has for the church. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 5 and verses 25 to 28,

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

Husbands should sacrifice their own interests and comforts for the sake of their wives. They should show the same sort of love for their wives as Christ showed the church. Jesus laid down his life for the church, and husbands should, metaphorically at least, lay down their lives for their wives. They should keep promises. They should work hard to provide for their wives and for their children. They should show kindness and consideration to their wives, and not be overbearing or expect too much from them. Peter says in his first letter, chapter 3 and verse 7,

“Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Husbands should be patient with any faults that their wives may have, and be kind and forbearing. The husband should, in the way he treats his wife, embody the teaching about love that the apostle Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4 to 7:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

For wives, to honour marriage means that they should submit to their husbands, as the church submits to Christ. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5 and verses 22 to 24,

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

For a wife to honour marriage will mean that she conducts herself as a wife in God's way. Our society says that the idea of wives submitting to their husbands is an old fashioned idea that belongs to the Victorian era and is to be done away with. The claim is made that we have a far superior way of understanding things now. But the clear teaching of Scripture is that wives are to submit to their husbands.

You might object, "I would submit to my husband if he loved me with the love of Christ. But he does not. He is a brute! How can I submit to a man who treats me badly?" But this very point is answered by Peter in his first letter chapter 3, where he speaks about what a woman is to do if her husband does not obey God's Word. The woman is to win over her husband by her godly submission. Peter says,

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Part and parcel of spouses treating each other right is that there should be no threats of divorce, or suggestion of it, by either party. You should make it plain to your spouse that, come what may, you are with him or her for life. You should NEVER use the threat of divorce as a lever in an argument.

There should, of course, also be no violence towards a spouse, or threat of violence, or use of physical force. Both should be gentle and kind to each other.

So, there are some of the ways in which we are to honour marriage.

3. Let the marriage bed be undefiled

The second thing we see from this verse is that we are exhorted to make sure that the marriage bed is undefiled.

This is clearly saying that that the sexual relationship between a husband and his wife should not be sullied by adultery. Sex is good, and was created by God. If you are married you can enjoy sex with

your spouse, and you do not need to feel guilty for doing so. But sex is only to take place within the context of marriage, and should only happen between the man and his wife. No other person should get a look in.

For those who are married, their sexual desires should be focussed exclusively upon their spouse. Do not look over the hedge. If you are a married man, do not allow yourself to look at any immodest photographs or films. NEVER view pornography. If you see a woman walking down the street who is dressed immodestly, turn your eyes away. Job said, in chapter 31 verse 1, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." Jesus said that if a man looks at woman with lust in his eye he has committed adultery with her in his heart. Let your desire be focussed only upon your own spouse. Turn your attention fully on the attractiveness of your own wife. Be besotted with her, and spend all your sexual energy on her. Proverbs chapter 5 and verses 18 and 19 says, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love."

Avoid the sin of adultery like the plague. Do not give any opportunity for it. If at all possible do not be alone with a member of the opposite sex. Certainly do not form a close friendship with a member of the opposite sex to whom you are not married. An "affair" often starts with a sympathetic friendship, which then moves on to sex. Do not give any opportunity for such a thing.

If you are not married and a married person takes an interest in you, run! Follow Joseph's example when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. It takes two to have an affair. Make sure that you do not give any encouragement to a married person who takes an interest in you.

4. The reason: God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterer

We have seen ways in which we are to honour marriage. We have seen how the marriage bed must be undefiled.

Let us now go on to see the reason that is given. The writer to the Hebrews that we should honour marriage, and keep the marriage bed undefiled, because "God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous".

Sexual sin leads to God's judgement even in this life. Sexual immorality, or fornication, carries a high price. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 18 that "the sexually immoral person sins against his own body".

When you have sex with someone, you become joined to that person. You become, in a mysterious way, "one flesh" with him or her. But if you are not in the covenant of marriage, sooner or later your relationship will come to an end. This will lead to your being ripped apart. Not only will this hurt you now. It may make it very hard for you to marry someone else. Even if you are able to marry, previous sexual activity may make it hard to have a good sexual relationship with your spouse. When you have sex with someone to whom you are not married, you also harm him or her.

Adultery is that much worse, because it involves the breach of a promise. Inevitably, adultery usually necessitates that you live a lie, as you seek to conceal your affair. On top of the negative effects of sexual immorality, adultery also causes lasting and deep shame, family breakdown, and poverty. It is very hard for a man or woman who has been adulterous to be ever trusted again.

Sexual immorality and adultery do not merely lead to the judgement of God in this life, however. Those who continue in these sins without repentance will come under God's eternal judgement.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verses 9 and 10,

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

This is the plain teaching of Scripture. You may claim to be a Christian, you may have been baptised, you may be accepted as a church member, you might even be a pastor, but the teaching of Scripture is that if you continue in the sin of sexual immorality or adultery and do not repent, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. You are still dead in your sins. You are on your way to hell.

What is the answer? Should you try harder to be a better person? Should you turn over a new leaf? No. Your own efforts will never make

you good enough for heaven. You need to be converted. You need to be truly born again. You need to be saved by Christ.

The apostle Paul goes on in the section that I read, in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 11, to say that this is what happened to some of the believers in Corinth. He says, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

God has provided salvation in Jesus Christ, his Son. When Jesus died upon the Cross, he was punished for all our sexual sin, all our lust, all our greed, all our adultery, all our homosexual and lesbian acts, all our pride, our idolatry, and all our other gross and shameful sins. If you come to him, he will wash you clean. He will make you holy. He will transform your life. How is he able to do this? Because he is the eternal Son of God. He is not only a prophet. He is God become man. So his blood shed on the Cross has vast power to save and to transform.

So, I ask you, have you ever truly known Christ? Have you been truly born again? Have you every seen yourself as a hell-deserving sinner? Have you ever thrown yourself upon God for salvation? If you are in any doubt at all, come to him. Ask him to save you and to give you eternal life.

The great good news is that even if you have been a terrible sinner, an adulterer, someone who has been flagrantly sexually immoral, or a practicing homosexual or Lesbian, or a thief, an idolater or the practitioner of any other sin, no matter how gross, if you come to Christ, and repent and put your trust in him, you will be forgiven

If you have already been saved, then hear this message. Honour God's precious institution of marriage. Honour God's definition of marriage. See marriage as a blessed and holy thing. If you are not yet married, honour marriage by abstaining from any sexual relations until you are married. If you are a parent, honour marriage by not interfering with the decisions of your married children. If you are married, honour marriage by treating your spouse well. Keep the marriage bed undefiled by pouring all your sexual desire and energy into your own spouse. If you have been truly saved, you need never fear condemnation. But the knowledge that you are not condemned should lead you to shun those sins that will bring God's wrath upon those who are not saved. If you are saved, put all sin, including sexual sin, to

death, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and live a pure and chaste life before God.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=91017530362>

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