

How to Live Honourably in Your Marriage

Hebrews 13:4

Halifax: 12 May 2024

Introduction:

Our morning sermon series has been in the epistle of Hebrews.

- We are in the last chapter now—chapter 13.
- Here we have instructions about how we should live as believers who have a Saviour like Jesus whose person and saving work was so fully and richly presented to us in the first ten chapters.
 - We are told in those chapters of His superiority to angels, to Moses, to Joshua, to Aaron and the priests of the Old Testament, and to the sacrifices that were offered in the Old Testament.
 - Jesus is the one all of those things that were featured in the Old Testament pointed to. God's salvation of sinners has its fulfillment entirely in Him!
 - It is by trusting in Him and His saving work that we can have complete forgiveness so that we can live in full harmony with the living God.
 - He Himself is God's Son who came to reconcile us to His divine household—to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, blessed forever.

In chapter 12 & 13, we are exhorted to run the race to God's house with endurance.

- Jesus is the one who made the way and who is the way.
- We are to go on and on looking to Him until the end when we enter His house in glory.
- We are to go with His people, the church that He has redeemed, continuing in brotherly love as those who have been reconciled to our heavenly Father and His Son and who live as His own by His grace.

Right now, in chapter 13, we are looking at the various instructions about continuing in brotherly love.

- We have seen that we are to reach out to brothers (other Christians) who are strangers and to remember those who are persecuted for Christ.
- And last week, we came to verse 4 where we saw that we are to maintain a very high view of marriage.
 - It is honourable because it is God's institution.
 - It is honourable because God appointed it to be a picture of Christ and His relationship with the church.
 - It is honourable because it is here that brotherly love is especially learned and exhibited.
 - The marriage bed (sex in marriage) is also honourable.
 - There is nothing shameful about the marriage bed as so many wrongly suppose.
 - Such relations are holy and pure. God gave them to us before we fell.
 - Sexual relations outside of marriage, on the other hand, are very shameful and wicked. Those who engage in them without repentance will be severely judged.
 - Sexual purity and a high view of marriage are not just something that ought to be true of those who are redeemed by Christ. They are something that is true of them.

- Let me be plain. If you practice sex outside of marriage, you are not a true Christian and you will go to hell when you die unless you repent and come to Jesus for forgiveness. That is what God's word says.

This week, I decided to preach on Hebrews 13:4 again.

- I was not intending to when I prepared the sermon for last week.
- But I started thinking about it after I preached it because, frankly, marriages are weak in the modern church, and there are unhealthy marriages in our own congregation.
- As I was considering this, a couple of people randomly told me that they would like to have more about marriage—about how to honour marriage—so I decided to do it.

For our scripture reading, I will read chapter 13, verses 1-4. Here is the word of God.

Hebrews 13:1-4: Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. ³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also. ⁴ Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Thanks be to God for His precious and holy Word.

I. Let's look at some of the visible problems in today's Christian marriages.

A. How many of you could really say that your marriage sings?

1. Some of you might be able to justly say: "Our marriage is healthy."

- The Lord has helped us to grow together over the years. Our love is much stronger and deeper than it was when we first began.
 - He has helped us work through our differences and help each other in our walk, and there is no one we'd rather be with than each other.
- The wife says, "No one understands me and helps me like my husband does.
 - "I have learned to trust in his leadership of our home, and I know that I can safely lean on him to lead us in faithful service to the Lord.
 - "He has helped me to grow and learn to trust in the Lord's goodness and faithfulness."
- And the husband says, "My wife is a great delight to me. I am so thankful for her.
 - "She encourages me in my calling to lead our home and helps me to see things that I simply would not have seen.
 - "I know I can trust her to be faithful in our home—I can't believe all that she does for us and for others.
 - "God has been very good to us and given us ministry together."

2. But many of you might rather say something like this about your marriage.

- We are Christians.
 - We are married in the Lord, but our marriage does not sing.
 - We know that marriage is honourable, but ours isn't.
- For some, this is an exaggeration.
 - The LORD has in fact given you a godly marriage.
 - You are growing together as heirs of the grace of life.
 - There are definitely some areas that need improvement, but the good thing is that when issues arise you don't just leave them unaddressed.

- Like all Christians, you are aware of many areas that need improvement.
 - But if you look back over the years, you can see that by God's grace, you have been able to work through things...
 - And you can see that overall, you have been making progress and are continuing to do so.
 - You have prayed and God has been faithful to answer your prayers.
 - You know that without the Lord, your marriage would have likely ended long ago.
 - But for others, there are serious issues that have invaded your marriage.
 - It is something that you struggle with every day.
 - The two of you simply cannot seem to get along.
 - Sometimes you wonder where God is in all of this.
- B. Let's look at some of the things that characterise an ungodly marriage.
- If you have children, these are things that you often see manifested in their lives too—or that you see them reacting to.
 1. Perhaps your home is full of anger.
 - Maybe there is lots of irritation and friction—one or both of you is frequently annoyed with the other.
 - Perhaps you flare up at each other, raising your voice—even cursing at times, which is no trivial thing. It received capital punishment under the direction of the LORD in the Old Testament.
 - On the other hand, your anger may be more of the cold sort—underlying bitterness and resentment.
 2. Perhaps it is lying that has invaded your home.
 - There is distrust.
 - You are not open and honest, you hide things—hiding rather than confessing your sin—
 - For example, when you have been neglecting your duties, you cover it up; or you spend money on something you should not have, and you hide it; or you give yourself to excess in eating or drinking and lie.
 3. Maybe your home is characterised by anxiety and fear.
 - You are constantly worried about the direction of the world, about your health, your income, an economic meltdown—
 - You are all worried about your retirement so that you don't even tithe.
 - Or maybe not that, but about making a mistake—any kind of mistake—or about embarrassing yourself.
 - You are paralysed in your ministry to others because of your fears.
 4. Maybe it is laziness.
 - If something is hard or unpleasant, you avoid it or put it off.
 - In connection with that, you have come up with all kinds of excuses to justify your inaction—or you just busy yourself with social media or something like that.

- You rarely reach out to others, rarely minister to them or lend them a helping hand. You neglect duties around the home and it is a constant source of irritation.
5. Maybe your home is characterised by a lack of affection.
 - There is an indifference to each other where you really don't care about your spouse's problems, but only about your own.
 - Perhaps you even argue with them about how has it the worst—or change the subject if they bring something up!
 - No one says “I love you” or wishes you well or prays for you—or asks you how your day went. You just don't care about each other.
 6. We could go on and on.
 - There are homes filled with ingratitude and complaining.
 - Marriages that have no marriage bed.
 - Homes full pride and boasting... and gossip about others.
 - Homes that have been invaded by pornography or romance novels and stories.
 - Homes full of criticism.
 - Homes full of covetousness—always wanting more and holding what you have with a tight grip.
 - Homes full of selfishness where everyone is looking out for their own interests instead of the interests of others.
 - Homes full of impatience.

TRANS> You get the idea. But what is the root of the problem?

II. The root of the problem with your marriage is that you do not fear God the way you should.

A. Fearing God means that you recognise His supreme importance.

1. God is our creator, lawgiver, and judge.
 - Absolutely nothing compares in importance to Him.
 - Our life is found when we lose our lives in Him.
 - We were created from the beginning to do His will—to please Him in everything we do.
 - We are here to live for His glory and honour in dependence upon Him.
2. When we don't do that, everything goes wrong.
 - God created us with the ability to fall away from Him—to turn from His way to our own way. That is the way that our father Adam took.
 - As his children, we were all caught up in his sin.
 - The Bible tells says of us that, in our fallen estate, **“There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Rom 3:18)”**
 - This means that we live as if God doesn't matter.
 - We live as if what He says is not important.
 - We just don't care about whether our actions please Him or not.
 - Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes that to live without reference to God is vanity.

- It makes everything you do as worthless as the vapour that you breathe out on a cold day that disappears into the air.

B. What does this have to do with problems in marriage?

1. It means that your marriage has the problems it has because your family does not fear God.
 - It is possible that one of you fears God, but as a couple united in marriage, you do not fear God—either at all or the way you ought.
2. If you did, you would not live in disregard of what He says about marriage.
 - Again, pleasing God would be of supreme importance to you!
 - Instead of doing it your own way, you would want to follow His mandate about marriage. You would pay attention to what He says in places like Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3.
 - Pleasing Him and glorifying would be your focus and commitment as a couple.

TRANS> Let me just pause right there and ask you, is your and your spouse's goal in your marriage to live in it in a way that pleases God?

C. What would that look like in your marriage.

1. For you husbands, your goal would be for your love and care of your wife to look as much as possible like Christ's love and care for the church.
 - That would be your agenda, what was most important to you.
 - Instead of protecting yourself, defending yourself, avoiding your responsibility, being unconcerned about your dear wife and indifferent to her concerns, you would be looking to love her as Christ loves the church.
 - You would want to lead your family to worship God, praise His name each day, to receive His word, to obey Him, to pray in dependence on Him not only for your financial and physical needs, but for spiritual strength to serve Him, to know Him, to glorify Him, to enjoy Him.
2. For you wives, your goal would be for your respect and obedience to your husband as God's appointed leader of your home to look as much as possible like the true church's respect and obedience to Christ.
 - You would want to support your husband in the agenda that he has for your family.
 - You would recognise the responsibility that God has given him and seek to make it easy for him to lead.
 - Instead of criticising and belittling him, you would see to it, as it says in Ephesians 5, that you respect him—even if he is not doing a very good job.
3. For both of you, it would mean that whenever you see something that is not right in your marriage (or your life for that matter), you would be motivated to address it.
 - Failure to address problems is what wrecks things.
 - We are sinners and problems will arise—but when you fear God, you can't just leave them—you have to address them and you want to address them in a way that pleases God.
 - That is what wrecks so many professing Christian homes today.

- There is no fear of God. Nobody cares to address the problems unless they make them uncomfortable.
 - If God is not that important, the bother of seriously addressing the issues outweighs the bother of the problems themselves.
- Suppose you are being crabby with your wife? Well, she bothers you, so you aren't that worried about it. You don't care about what God thinks.
 - But if you fear God, then being crabby with her becomes a big deal—it becomes something that you must rectify.
 - You cannot let it go on because you realise that nothing matters but pleasing God. Pleasing Him and glorifying Him is your focus.
 - Anything else is unacceptable.

TRANS> Do you see how this works?

- Lately, I have been thinking about what it would be like if I could live the day over again. What would I do differently? How would I respond differently?
 - It is humbling, but helpful.

III. But what if you simply don't fear God? What if that is just not a factor with you in your marriage? What can you do then?

A. There is a good chance that you don't fear God because you do not recognise that there is forgiveness with Him.

1. You look at how you are living in your marriage, and you don't think you can do any better. What is, is, and there is nothing you can do about it.
 - Maybe you have tried in the past, and failed. Maybe you have even prayed.
 - You don't see how you could ever please God.
2. And do you know, you are right.
 - You cannot please God. You are a sinner. God is holy. He utterly rejects sinners.
 - Try as you might, you will never be able to please Him.

➤ So should you just give up? Absolutely not!

B. I am here to tell you that there is forgiveness with God.

1. When God speaks of forgiveness, He does not only mean that He won't hold the sins that you have done against you. It is that, but much more than that!
 - His forgiveness always involves complete restoration.
 - When He forgives, he restores your living so that your living pleases Him.
2. That's why He tells us that if we go on living in sin and disregard of Him (if there is no fear of God), it shows that we have never been forgiven.
 - We may have asked Him to forgive us, but our asking was wrong because it did not include a desire to be restored to Him.
 - All we wanted was to escape punishment—not to be forgiven so that we could be restored to a right relationship with Him—to be forgiven so that we could stop living for ourselves and start living for Him—

- Or, to put it in the way I have been talking about, to be forgiven so that we could fear Him—regard Him as supreme—as most important—and start pleasing Him as the very object of our living!
- There is forgiveness that fully restores our relationship with Him.

C. The forgiveness of God that restores is what Hebrews is all about.

1. The first ten and half chapters are about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became the perfect high priest for sinners!
 - He is higher than the angels—He is the Son of God and the heir of heaven.
 - He made Himself to be a man so He could be our priest—and not only a priest who offers a sacrifice for our sins, but the perfect righteous sacrifice that can actually take away our sin.
 - He was tempted in all ways that we are, yet without sin. He sympathises with us in all our temptations and infirmities.
 - He is our priest forever, not in a ritual temple, but in actually appearing before God to satisfy for our sins forever with the sacrifice of Himself.
 - This is still not all. A priest is to pray for his people, and Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us—He is always able to apply His sacrifice to take away our sin and to transform us.
 - He is therefore able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him.
 - He promises to save those who come to God by Him—who look to Him—casting themselves upon Him.
2. You must come to God about the sin you find in your marriage—and your life.
 - He will pardon you and He will give you grace to do the will of God in your marriage.
 - We won't be perfect in this life, but we will be able to overcome our sin and live for God as much as it depends on us in our marriage.
 - You may have an unbelieving spouse, but if you come to Jesus, He will enable you to live in a way that pleases God in relationship to that unbelieving spouse—whatever they may do.
 - But if you and your spouse both come to Him, you can have a marriage that pleases Him.
 - If the supreme desire of you both for your marriage is to please God in it, and you look to Jesus, you will be able to please Him.
3. What joy you will have when you turn from your way of doing things to Jesus, your faithful high priest, so that you can start living honourably in your marriage.

Conclusion: So you see, I have brought you back to the overall theme and purpose of this epistle to the Hebrews.

- Jesus is a priest like no other. He is the only priest who can truly bring us to God.
- Run the race that is marked out before you, looking unto Jesus.
 - You don't need a bunch of techniques about how to get along in your marriage. You need to set out with the determined purpose to please God—no matter what your spouse may or may not do—and to look to Christ to enable you to do that.

- If you only care about having a good marriage and you don't care about pleasing God, then Christ will not help you. His purpose is to reconcile you to God, not to give you a marriage that satisfies you, but a life that pleases His Father.