

# Honoring the Marriage Bed: In Principle and Practice – *Heb 13:4*

**Introduction** – Our modern culture is at war with God and since they cannot attack God directly, they turn and attack His image. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:28). Jesus instructs us that this verse has direct application to the definition, purpose, and regulation of marriage (Mark 10:6-9). Marriage as a covenant bond between a man and a woman is an institution founded not in cultural convention or convenience, but in God’s act of creation. That is why the attack on the image of God is also an attack on creation, and that is why so much of today’s sexual foolishness looks so, well, foolish.

At the same time, our flesh is also at war with the Spirit of God (Gal 5:17) and so even as we stand principally for the truth of God’s Word over sex, marriage, and procreation, we must put those principles into practice by putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Col 3:5) and cultivating a way of life that truly honors the marriage bed. The sexual union of a husband and a wife is a part of the declaration of the union of Christ and His bride and so this is a gospel issue (Eph 5:32). It is also an issue that brings great delight or horrible tragedy and despair in the created world God made.

**Honoring the Marriage Bed in Principle** – “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*”

The first phrase means that God’s institution of marriage (a covenant bond, sovereignly administered by solemn vows, with attendant blessings and curses), is honorable, that is, it is a glorious, powerful, majestic, and respectable institution which is to be cherished by all. The bond, by definition, is between one man and one woman with vows until death. When a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh, and their relationship with the rest of the world is transformed as well. That means it is honored by those who are married (by keeping the vows) and by those who are outside of that marriage (by respecting those vows and holding a couple responsible to keep those vows). Just consider for a moment what this world would be like if this were to happen. How many societal troubles exist because the institution of marriage is not honored in every way?

The second phrase means that we are talking about sex and discipline. In proverbial fashion, we really have two phrases talking about the same thing. So, to agree that marriage is honorable is to say that the marriage bed is undefiled. The covenant provides this fence by which intimacy can be properly given, received, enjoyed, and made fruitful in many ways.

The third phrase is the other side of the coin, addressing the way that the marriage bed becomes defiled. Fornication includes any sexual uncleanness, especially any sexual activity outside of a marriage covenant. Adultery is sexual activity contrary to an established marriage covenant. God loves the covenant He established and promises to bring His full judgment down upon those who would tamper with it. God will not only judge individuals who defile the marriage bed; He will judge nations that do so in principle. For us, this includes redefining marriage, redefining the fruit of the sexual union, permitting unlawful divorce, refusing to acknowledge male and female as creational designs, and promoting/protecting as rights all kinds of sexual perversions.

To stand positively with this principle, and to stand against any twisting of this institution is not to show hatred toward someone who differs. It is and ought to be a stand based on loyalty to God and love for the world. When it comes to marriage, family, and the resulting society, it truly is Christ or chaos. To stand against sexual immorality is not to be prudish or against sex. It is to be against sexual fraud. You don’t refuse counterfeit bills because you hate money. You refuse counterfeit bills because they aren’t money.

**Honoring the Marriage Bed in Practice** – “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*” If the principle is true and good, if we trust that God blesses obedience to them and brings curses to disobedience, then our practices need to show it (James 1:22). If sexual intimacy in marriage is honorable and undefiled, and all other sexual activity is dishonorable and defiled, then –

**Flee Fornication** (1 Cor 6:18) – You are a Christian which does not mean you will not face sexual temptation. You will, as did the Corinthians. You will in great measure, as did the Corinthians. To “*corinthianize*” was common jargon meaning to give oneself to all manner of lusts and sexual defilement. When facing such temptations, Christians are to cut and run. We are to flee immediately. Jesus says to cut off your hand if it causes you to sin (Matt 18:8), so an application of this might be to get rid of your computer, your smartphone, your Netflix subscription, or the company you keep, all the while knowing that the core problem is your heart (Matt 15:19). Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (v19) and you’ve been bought with a price, not only your soul, but your body (v20). Don’t think of the body as having a cavity where you can find the Holy Spirit sitting. This is related to the resurrection of the body (vv13-14). He is indwelling, united to, your body.

Connected to this, we must repent of the idea that sexual activity with someone outside the covenant is natural (1 Cor 6:13). Dating or courting (or living with a boyfriend/girlfriend) is not marriage, there are no covenant fences, and so intimacy is not safe, natural, or blessed by God. Fornication sounds like such a harsh word and we are tempted to think that isn’t what’s going on in one’s own “loving relationship.” But any kind of unmarried fooling around, and every reasonable person knows what fooling around is, is what we are to flee from.

**Pursue Sanctification** (1 Thess 4:1-8) – This is the will of God (v3) and that journey of sanctification is a hard journey. This means that we must conquer and possess our own vessel (v4 – which could refer to one’s own body or the body of his or her spouse) in holiness and honor, which is the opposite of the passion of lust like the pagans. If we do not do this, God will avenge the one we defraud (v6) and you don’t want to be on the receiving end of His vengeance. To follow the pagan view of sex and sexuality is to reject God (v8).

**The Disciplined Marriage Bed** (1 Cor 7:2-4) – Verse 2 should not be read as a command of Paul’s or the Lord’s. To “*touch a wife*” is a euphemism and Paul is addressing the things which they wrote to him (v1). He makes the case that, quite the opposite, in marriage, it is a good gift from God to render to one another what you vowed to give at the altar. To do so has the potential to produce children, as well as to celebrate and cultivate close, relational, and physical pleasure. And since the fall, it is a primary protection against sexual temptations. In a healthy marriage, the fact that temptations exist is not resented, but instead addressed in very earthy and practical ways (Prov 5:15-20).

If that doesn’t sound politically incorrect enough, let me push it further. Verse 4 says that each partner has authority over the other partner’s body. This means far more than simply a right to conjugal privilege. Rather, it means that the husband and wife have mutual responsibilities for their spouse’s desires, fears, thoughts, distractions, temptations, and particular frames. It does *not* mean that you have the right to make your spouse have the same desires, preferences, or distractions. The emphasis is not “you owe me,” but rather, “I owe you.” It is the language of “my life for yours.” It applies to far more than just the marriage bed, but it does include, if not actually begin, in the marriage bed. And as far as beds go, it can *only* take place in a marriage-bed, full of solemn vows and promises.

And all of this is because “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

---

Dave Hatcher – June 17, 2022