

HEBREWS 13:4 THE UNDEFILED MARRIAGE BED

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”¹

Listening to contemporary sociologists, one might conclude that marriage is a dying institution. Actually, one need not consult sociologists to draw such a negative conclusion—the incessant push to redefine marriage is indicative of a serious problem in our world. First, the push was to broaden the concept of marriage to permit same-sex marriage. The argument was that if two people loved one another, how could anyone doubt their love? Marriage was viewed solely as the means by which one was able to gratify his/her personal desires. Thus, whether we realised the transformation or not, marriage was redefined.

The natural fallout from this redefinition was as predictable as it was inevitable. If all that is required for marriage is fulfilling one’s personal desires, then why couldn’t multiple individuals enter into marriage? And if multiple individuals could enter into marriage, who was to say that children should be kept from marriage? And if children could be permitted to enter into marriage, then why not animals? The concerns expressed by Justice Antonin Scalia in *Lawrence v. Texas*² are being realised today; no moral arguments remain to delay the inevitable. Soon, the western nations will be indistinguishable from Sodom and Gomorrah.

The effort to redefine sexual morality is as old as sin itself. Similar dangers loomed when the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians drafted his missive. As that unknown writer drew the letter to a conclusion, he pointedly addressed the threat to the Faith in terse fashion. The inclusion of this warning should not be seen as superfluous; rather, it arises from a constant danger for Christians. His cautionary statement serves as the basis for our study today.

LET MARRIAGE BE HELD IN HONOUR AMONG ALL. For marriage to be held in honour, we must know what marriage is. In order to know what marriage is, we should ask Him who gave marriage what His intent was. Thus, we find ourselves directed to the first marriage. When God had completed creating the heavens and the earth, filling the earth with the various animal kinds, He created Adam. We read, “The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” [GENESIS 2:7].

The acme of God’s creation was man; the man was unique, though it appears that he didn’t realise his uniqueness. God brought the man to realisation of his unique character through a most fascinating means. The account of that divine revelation is provided in GENESIS 2:18-20. “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Scalia, J., dissenting, “John Geddes Lawrence and Tyron Garner, Petitioners v. Texas,” June 26, 2003, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/pdf/02-102P.ZD>, accessed 11 January 2013

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It seems apparent that with completion of the task of naming all the animals, the man realised his uniqueness. As an aside, it is apparent from this account that man did not evolve from an ape; otherwise, Adam would have recognised a bond with the apes when he named them. Adam was made aware of his spiritual and intellectual uniqueness—and his aloneness; God had caused those animals nearest in “kind” to the man—the livestock, the birds of the heavens and all the beast of the field—to pass before the man. Moreover, it would seem that Adam was aware that each animal had its mate. Thus, Adam knew he was alone.

God had stated, “It is not good that the man should be alone,” [GENESIS 2:18]; and the man now knew as well that his state was “not good.” God had pronounced a benediction at completion of each step of the creation process, saying that His work was “good.”³ Ultimately, the Lord God pronounced His work as “very good” [GENESIS 1:31].

However, there was one aspect of creation that was “not good,” the lack of one who was man’s complement. The statement that this deficit was “not good” was for Adam’s benefit rather than being an “Oops!” from the LORD God. One should not imagine that God was suddenly forced to resort to “Plan B,” as though somehow he had forgotten something. Politicians demonstrate the Law of Unintended Consequences whenever they craft legislation without considering the consequences. Thus, we witness the sorry spectacle of Presidents forced to invoke executive action to remedy oversights or to avoid politically unpalatable aspects of signature legislation. However, that was not the case with God; God was bringing the man to realisation of his unique position; the man was discovering his deficit.

God remedied man’s pitiable condition of aloneness, acting in divine fashion to create one who was uniquely like man and yet was not man. This is the account that is presented in the Word. “The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

‘This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.’”

[GENESIS 2:21-23]

The Hebrew quite emphatically presents Adam as saying, “Wow!” Quite literally, Adam said, “This is the right step!” The thought conveyed by his exclamation could be summed up, “Finally!” It demonstrates that Adam was led through God’s instruction to recognise his deficit. The man could not be complete without the woman. This is not to say that singles are somehow incomplete; it is acknowledgement that marriage is focused on mutual complementation.

God then appends this assessment of the first marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” [GENESIS 2:24]. There is then given this enigmatic statement that some imagine to be unconnected to the rest of the account. “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” [GENESIS 2:25]. It is only apparently unconnected to the remainder of the account. The couple was not ashamed because they were not sinning. Husband and wife are permitted intimacy that others are not permitted, in contradistinction to the playboy morals so prevalent in this day. The man and the woman were at ease with one another, without fear of exploitation; they trusted one another.

³ GENESIS 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31

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As an aside of some considerable significance, why do we talk about sex so much in our culture? Compared to many cultures, we are obsessed with sex. At one time, not so long ago, “don’t ask, don’t tell” was the standard for all intimate relations. Decent people did not talk about intimacy with their spouse. I suggest that decent people still don’t talk to others about intimate time with their spouse. So, why do we talk about sex so much? Is it not because we recognise that we have lost intimacy? Is it not because we imagine that in freely discussing the most intimate facets of life we will somehow make the moments more intimate? I find that the more we expose our intimacy, the less intimacy we enjoy! Perhaps we should consult the one who made us to discover how to utilise the gifts He entrusted to us.

What we know of marriage from this account is several-fold, and it is significant. ***Marriage was given to mankind by God.*** That this is the case was emphasised by the Master on an occasion when He was queried by the Pharisees. The account of that interrogation is found in the first Gospel. “Pharisees came up to [Jesus] and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”?’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” [MATTHEW 19:3-6].

Know also that ***marriage is between a man and a woman in union throughout this life.*** God created one who would be a complement for the man. God spoke within the Godhead, saying, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” [GENESIS 2:18]. A couple of points must be emphasised. God chose to make ***a woman*** for the man. Thus, woman is the divine complement for a man. God did not make the woman to function solely as a companion for the man. Though wife and husband should enjoy one another’s company; a dog, a cat or even a budgie could have met the need for companionship. God presented one who would share intellectual and spiritual moments with the man.

God presented the woman to the man with the knowledge that both the man and woman were sexual beings, created thus by the hand of the LORD God. The LORD did command them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” [GENESIS 1:28]. It is a command and a blessing that would be repeated shortly after the Flood had subsided. Following the Flood, we read, “God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’” [GENESIS 9:1]. After assuring Noah and his family of God’s requirement that the life of those who shed the blood of others was to be forfeited, the LORD God again gave His blessing, openly approving of mankind’s sexual nature. God blessed mankind, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it” [GENESIS 9:7].

That the union was to be permanent is evident from the divine commentary. “A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” [GENESIS 2:24]. This understanding is ratified by Jesus’ comment to the Pharisees as noted earlier. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” [MATTHEW 19:6]. This accounts for God’s emphatic statement through Malachi, “I hate divorce” [MALACHI 2:16a, NET BIBLE]. Following this stern view is God’s cautionary statement to all, “Pay attention to your conscience, and do not be unfaithful” [MALACHI 2:16b, NET BIBLE].

By implication, the text means that ***marriage excludes all other forms of sexual union.*** Sex is a powerful force; and its power is to be enjoyed only in the context of marriage. Despite modern suggestions to the contrary, sexual activity is neither blessed nor condoned except for the marriage bed. Only between husband and wife is God honoured in sexual expression. This accounts for the command, “Let marriage be held in honour among all” [HEBREWS 13:4].

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Two primary ways in which marriage is dishonoured are *asceticism* and *libertinism*. *Asceticism*, or celibacy as it relates to marriage, is the concept that singleness is morally superior to marriage. In the apostolic period, there arose a surprising movement promoting celibacy as a desirable condition for Christians. An emphasis on virginity as belonging to a state of Christian perfection was promoted by the Montanist movement,⁴ which grew in popularity during the early years of the Faith. The continuing emphasis on celibacy among some religious groups today finds roots in this concept that was censured as deviant and errant so long ago.

Paul had warned against this very thing when he wrote Timothy, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5]. Because God created marriage, the follower of the Lord recognises that marriage is good. Therefore, those individuals rejecting marriage in favour of celibacy have dishonoured marriage.

I suspect that contemporary Christians have less trouble with an emphasis on asceticism today than with *libertinism*—the concept that marriage is irrelevant, permitting the individual to pursue unbridled sexual fulfilment. Modern culture emphasises gratification of every sexual desire as the summum bonum of existence. In libertinism, marriage is dishonoured. I can make the point no clearer than to say that sexual activity outside of marriage dishonours marriage. The transformation of marriage from one man in union with one woman for life into any other union as is promoted as equivalent to marriage in this day, dishonours marriage.

When professing Christians argue that no one is injured when government legalises same-sex marriage, they dishonour marriage. When professing Christians approve of or participate in the culture of divorce, they dishonour marriage. When professing Christians tacitly approve of adultery, or worse still participate in adulterous relationships, they dishonour marriage. Consequently, when we dishonour marriage, we dishonour God who gave marriage. By this criterion, it is fair to say that contemporary culture dishonours God, inviting His displeasure. That is not a position which we can long sustain as a society.

Reviewing the truths given in the Word, we note that there exist four purposes for marriage: companionship [see GENESIS 24:67; ECCLESIASTES 4:12]; sexual enjoyment and procreation [e.g. GENESIS 1:28; GENESIS 9:1, 7; 1 TIMOTHY 5:14]; encouraging self-control [see 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-7]; and illustrating the loving relationship between Christ and His church [see EPHESIANS 5:22-33]. How different these purposes are from the attitude that appears regnant in modern society. These purposes for marriage are worthy of further, brief consideration.

That *companionship* is an important facet of marriage is apparent from God’s statement, “It is not good that the man should be alone” [GENESIS 2:18]. The statement anticipates the divine assessment provided by the Wise Man. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” [ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12]. Each of us longs for a companion who accepts us as we are and shares in the vicissitudes of life.

⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, **A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews: The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament** (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1977) 566

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That marriage is meant to provide *sexual enjoyment and propagation of the race* is evident from God's command for the first couple to "Be fruitful and multiply" [**GENESIS 1:28**]. Solomon wrote a poetic paean for the joy of marriage.

“Drink water from your own cistern,
 flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for strangers with you.
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.”

[**PROVERBS 5:15-19**]

Marriage should *encourage self-control* and ensure that men and women have an outlet for their sexual desires. This is the basis for Paul's blunt statement recorded in his First Corinthian letter. "Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:2**]. Paul continues by cautioning married couples that they must not deprive one another of conjugal rights as such could readily lead to satanic temptation. He writes, "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:5**].

God's ideal for the marriage relationship is a *reflection of His love for His church*. We who preach the Word do well to remind congregants of Paul's teaching. "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 Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

"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 splendor, 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. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" [**EPHESIANS 5:22-33**].

A Christian couple living in loving harmony are to reflect the love between Christ and His church. Wives are to cultivate a submissive attitude toward their husbands, thus honouring marriage. Husbands must learn to love their wives, demonstrating love through an attitude of sacrifice for the sake of their wives. In doing this, husbands honour marriage. Husbands are to avoid becoming tyrannical, showing consideration and understanding of their wives in all things. Both husband and wife are to endeavour to honour marriage, for the Lord's sake.

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We fall in love, and we fall out of love just as readily; the reason being that we focus on our own fulfillment rather than focusing on fulfilling our partner. The primary argument for same sex marriage appears to be that anyone should be able to “marry” whomever they love; the emphasis is upon personal satisfaction. It is the identical argument that has been presented for decades to justify no fault divorce—no one should be required to continue in a “loveless” marriage. In other words, marriage is fabricated on the concept of personal gratification. One recent news item demonstrates this position. A woman bemoaning donating her kidney to her husband was met with the erstwhile husband commenting after marriage breakup, “I loved her but our relationship wasn’t working. We had big rows and her family never liked me.”⁵

LET THE MARRIAGE BED BE UNDEFILED. Jeannie C. Riley crooned about an adulterous relationship, “How can anything so right be so wrong?” Despite the popularity of the song, before God there can be no excuse for defiling the marriage bed. The author is emphatic in insisting that the marriage bed must be undefiled; the act of love is to be maintained in purity between husband and wife. The language used speaks of an offering presented before God. The writer speaks of the couple offering their lives as a pure offering made to each other and to God.

Such a view of marriage was radical when these words were written; and the concept remains radical in this day. Pliny the Younger was dispatched by the Emperor Trajan to govern the Province of Bithynia; he was charged especially to look for indictments against the Christians. Writing the emperor, he spoke of Christian worship in these terms, “[The Christians] customarily gathered before dawn on a fixed day to sing in alternation a hymn to Christ as if to a god, and they bound themselves by an oath, not in a criminal conspiracy, but to refrain from robbery, theft, or adultery, from breaking their word, from reneging on a deposit.”⁶

Imbued with the heady elixir of self-gratification, contemporary society considers adultery irrelevant, purity abnormal and sex a right. Thus, we are lectured that youth cannot control their impulses, so we must provide them condoms and instruct them in sexual techniques. Experts insist that the dissolution of a marriage is of no consequence, so there should be no guilt when a marriage breaks up. We are assured that people should expect to have sex on each date—women owe sex to the men who in turn expect sex from the women.

Nevertheless, God is quite serious in His expectation of purity among His people. Writing in the encyclical we know as the Letter to Ephesians, Paul instructs the people of God, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” [EPHESIANS 5:1-6].

In the first missive to the Corinthian congregation, the Apostle admonishes believers, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:18].

⁵ Breitbart.com, “Woman wishes to undo kidney donation to allegedly cheating husband,” 1/27/2014, <http://www.breitbart.com/system/wire/upiUPI-20140127-184731-6190>, accessed 28 January 2014

⁶ Lawrence J. Johnson, **Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources, Vol. 1** (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2009) 84

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The Apostle's language echoes Malachi who wrote centuries before Paul's serviced. "This second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 'For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless'" [MALACHI 2:13-16].

No communion is free of the taint of sexual impurity today; no believer should be smug. The Anglicans and the United Church actively promote immorality in the pulpit through appointment to holy orders men and women who dishonour marriage and cannot in any sense be said to have kept the marriage bed undefiled. Catholics have very public struggles with sexual immorality in the priesthood. Immorality among evangelicals is equally obvious as we read on almost a daily basis of youth leaders, pastoral staff or other church leaders who surrender to sexual proclivities. No protection against immorality is afforded in being religious; one must be born from above and maintain a walk with the One who gave marriage. Candidly, if the religious leaders are disqualified to provide moral guidance, what hope can there be for society?

I am aware that sexual immorality has been a feature of societies since the world began. Sexual immorality was central in bringing God's judgement in the Flood [see GENESIS 6:5]. Surveying the ancient world, Paul saw rampant immorality as a central feature of Roman society [see ROMANS 1:18-32]. Tragically, even among the churches of that ancient day immorality seeped in, necessitating drastic action [cf. 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-5; 2 CORINTHIANS 2:3-11]. In the Letter to the Church at Thyatira, the Risen Christ exposed sexual wickedness that was tolerated by the saints. "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden" [REVELATION 2:18-24].

The results of failure within contemporary culture to maintain purity in the marriage relationship is as obvious as it is heartbreaking—forcible rapes, illegitimate births and rampant venereal disease. Some ethnic groups report that up to 74% of births are to unmarried mothers; the lowest birthrate for unmarried women among any ethnic group approaches one in four. The children raised in single parent homes are often bereft of a positive male image and they adopt a low view of women. The young men disproportionately become brutes and the young women are trained to trade sex in hope of finding love—both are doomed to disappointment. This is not the time for the churches to censure such struggling women; this is the time for the churches to preach the Gospel of Grace, offering shelter and instruction in righteousness!

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In the First Corinthian Letter, Paul has written, “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

“To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-16]?

Modern music presents a very low view of morality and purity. Language grows increasingly degenerate, contemporary prose is like the dripping of a broken sewer, raw filth pours into our homes through television and videos contaminating all it touches and even the video games we purchase for our children are defiled with filth and violence. In such perilous times, the presence of Christian couples has a far greater impact than any of us could imagine. The world may not act as though our presence is welcomed, but in Christ we point to that which is far better; we do so through loving one another, though living holy and godly lives and especially through picturing the relationship of righteousness in marriage. Underscore in your minds the concept that we Christians are called to be outrageously pure.

GOD WILL JUDGE THE SEXUALLY IMMORAL AND ADULTEROUS. The call for Christians to be pure is not something about which we should ever grow casual. No Christian should trifle with God’s command for purity. God, the Living God, is holy, and He calls His people to holiness. The writer of this missive to Hebrew Christians warns, “God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” [HEBREWS 13:4]. That warning should give pause to all within this modern licentious, libertine culture. Sexual activity outside of biblical marriage does bring divine judgement. Even those who are outside the Faith must give an accounting to God for their infidelity to spouses and for their immorality. God is quite clear on the awful, and eternal, consequences of defiance toward His design.

Earlier, the writer of this letter was guided by the Spirit to warn those to whom he wrote, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” [HEBREWS 12:15-17]. There is a point of no return for those who think to defy the Lord God.

Writing the saints in Corinth, the Apostle has warned, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20].

In the Ephesian letter, Paul has cautioned all who will heed what is written in the Word, “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” [EPHESIANS 5:5, 6].

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Among earliest missives from Paul's pen is his first letter to the church in Thessalonica. In that letter, the Apostle reminds his readers of God's will. "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you" [1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-7].

All who are outside the grace of Christ Jesus are now under judgement. Scripture warns, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" [JOHN 3:18]. God also warns the unsaved, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" [JOHN 3:36].

Christians who have ignored the will of God, sinning egregiously as they pursue their own will, must stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. We who believe are clearly warned, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10]. Reviewing what shall occur on that day when we stand before Christ the Lord, the Apostle has written, "If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15].

Perhaps I have spoken to someone who is even now conscience stricken. You know that the warnings presented apply to your life, and you wonder whether you can be forgiven. Perhaps you question whether there is any reason to continue to try to honour God because you imagine your past choices have disqualified you from honouring Christ the Lord. The judgements of which the text warns loom ominously over your life and you are justifiably in terror. I point you to the divine promise delivered through the Apostle of Love. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [1 JOHN 1:9].

David's great sin of adultery and murder was scandalous, deplorable, grievous. Confronted by the Prophet of God, David sought and found forgiveness. He would write of his sin in words that model what you also must say before the Lord God:

"Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!"

[PSALM 51:1, 2]

I urge you to confess your sin, turning from the evil and seeking forgiveness. It may not be possible to repair the harm you have caused, but you can seek God's forgiveness. We know the Lord is merciful and gracious [e.g. PSALM 86:15], receiving those who turn again to seek Him. What comfort lies in the knowledge that the Lord forgives those who ask pardon from Him!

HEBREWS 13:4
THE UNDEFILED MARRIAGE BED

Having confessed his sin, David could testify:

“I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah”

[PSALM 32:5]

And such can be your testimony as well. God will forgive you when you acknowledge your sin and ask His mercy.

What has this message to do with love? More importantly, what has the message to do with the church? When there is no trust, love is destroyed. When trust is present, love can flourish. God seeks what is good for His people and glory for His Name. If we ignore His will, we shall see neither good for our families nor glory for His people.

For the church that fails to hold Christians to the divine standard, know that immorality perverts theology. I have personally known several preachers who became involved in what they imagined were secret affairs. God will not tolerate such activity; He will expose the preacher that imagines he can continue such a duplicitous life. For a while these once blessed men continued preaching, but they were dividing truth so that they became practical relativists, their relativism eating away at their faith until they were driven from the pulpit and in many instances even driven from the Faith. They preached as though there was a truth for themselves and another truth for those to whom they preached. These men suffered loss of spiritual power, their spiritual vigour diminished until they were powerless. At last, they were trapped and compelled to surrender to the inevitable with the concomitant shame that always attends exposure.

There can be no doubt that such people have discredited the Word and brought great harm upon the churches of our Master. Only eternity will reveal how many souls have been condemned to eternal damnation through the deceit and duplicity of immoral church leaders. There can be no estimate of the number of individuals just experiencing the first spiritual stirrings, only to be turned away from pursuing the Faith because of a pastor, a televangelist, a Sunday School teacher or another church leader who deceived himself into thinking that purity was unimportant. The sin of immorality—especially sexual immorality—is so lethal to the congregation, that it is truly better to be dead than to damage the church.

Please hear this final cautionary statement, and determine to choose what honours God. From the Throne of Heaven, the Lord God speaks, saying “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” [REVELATION 21:6-8].

May God apply the message to each heart as He wills. May He impel His holy people to seek purity in all things, especially in marriage. May He encourage each individual who names His Name to take to heart the Word that teaches, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” [HEBREWS 13:4]. Amen.