

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part three - Teaching #1348

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WHY THIS WHOLE SERIES WON'T DO SOME PEOPLE ANY GOOD

If books and videos and conferences on marriage created good marriages, no time or place on earth should have better, more lasting marriages than we have today. But such is not the case. Two out of three marriages will end in divorce. And it makes absolutely no difference whether the couple marrying are atheists or Christians. What that means is the next time you're at a wedding in our church, no matter who it is, the safe money is on their *divorce*, not their *marriage*.

What this *should* do is make those of us who *are* married tremendously *thankful* and tremendously *careful* in our marriages. For those who are still *single*, learn to treasure Christ *more* than you long for an earthly partner. Loving Christ *now* more than you plan to love your spouse in the *future* is the only way to enter a life-long marriage. Marriages don't end right away. There are no *safe* times for *any* marriage. Couples don't *plan* for their marriages to end while they're dancing at their receptions. The marriages that grow and thrive do so because the husband and the wife *grow* their marriage with God's help. The best marriage will start to wilt the minute the partners start to coast. Woe to the couple who starts to *assume* a good future for their relationship.

O, how we need freshly awakened in the church a fresh thirst for all the means of receiving God's marriage saving grace. How we need to keep drinking deep from the marriage saving life of the Holy Spirit. When you know you're living in an earthquake zone, you take deeper care that you don't build your house on sand.

All of this leads to the issue at hand. Isn't Father God loving toward the marriages of His children? Aren't there books and seminars and counselors aplenty? What has gone wrong? And if we can know what has gone wrong, why can't we seem to fix it? This, it seemed to me, was an appropriate question to raise right near the beginning of this series.

Hebrews 13:4-6 - "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. [5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' [6] So we can confidently say,

'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'

Let's just do some preliminary work with these words. There are several obvious teaching points:

- a) The writer requires a certain mind-set - a certain commitment - to marriage in general. Marriage is to be **"held in honor among all"**(4). In the next phrase he'll deal with the way **sexual immorality** defiles and destroys marriage, but that's not what he's talking about in this first phrase.

He's saying everybody has to have a certain **reverence** for marriage. And this reverence needs to be a **visible** - a **displayed** - reverence that becomes the common, shared attitude toward marriage by **everyone in the Christian community**. **"By all,"** the writer says.

And let's be very careful in our reading here. He's not saying Christians are to hold their **spouse** in honor. He's not talking about any particular husband or wife in this command that marriage be held in honor. He's talking about the **mental air** the church breathes. He's calling for a distinctly **counter-cultural** valuing of marriage. We don't view it as **a road to self-fulfillment** on the part of the participants. We don't view it as **disposable**. We don't view it as **open** in terms of including other sexual partners. We don't see the **terms** of marriage as being **humanly redefinable**.

No. We the church - and I don't just mean the **married** people in the church - we **all** exalt marriage. We all defend it. We lift marriage high above our own happiness or fulfillment. We see it as something God-defined and God-created. It's sacred. We **honor** marriage.

- b) The next thing our text says is God will judge those who are sexually immoral - **"....and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous"**(13:4). It used to be that Christians couldn't read words like that without thinking about them. But those days are gone. Today many Christians (or at least **professing** Christians) don't feel threatened in any way by the judgment of God when they intentionally sin. They tell themselves that because they **"believe in Jesus,"** or **"love Jesus,"** they are free to pursue their own desires with immunity to rejecting the clear commands of Father God.

These words - these **warning** words - are written, not to the **world**, but to the **church**. They're written

to a group of people who may be right on the edge of believing that because their sins are erased through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross Father God now lovingly allows them to pursue their own agenda without His interference.

And I just want to pause and say it as *lovingly* but as *firmly* as I know how - if that's your attitude toward willfully committing known sin after claiming saving grace through Jesus Christ, you're *not* saved. You're *not* a Christian at all. You never *did* understand what "*getting saved*" means. And you may soon come to the place where you're going to decide this whole "*church thing*" doesn't work. But it won't be because Christ isn't wonderfully real, or that grace can't powerfully transform. It will be because you never truly *understood* the terms of God's grace, or truly *experienced* it in its genuine nature.

Those are two of the basic background points in our text. Marriage is to be *honored*. And God always *judges* the sexually immoral and adulterous. Now to the main teaching point of today - *why this whole series won't do some people any good*:

1) **BIBLICAL TRUTH WILL NEVER BE HEARD BY PEOPLE WHO DESIRE SOMETHING ELSE MORE THAN THEY DESIRE TO DO THE WILL OF FATHER GOD**

I know that's an involved sermon point, but, when you take the time to dig, it's set out clearly in our marriage text - **Hebrews 13:4-6** - "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. [5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' [6] So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

It is not accidental nor coincidental that these words about *contentment* are sandwiched right between the command to *honor marriage* (4) and the promise of *God's supernatural help and intervention* (6). Contentment is linked between these two ideas because it is the link between the two in actual *experience*.

In other words, nothing will make anything God says seem less **appealing**, less **applicable**, and less **possible** to His children than the inner disposition of **discontent**. The truth that is perfectly obvious right now to my heart when I see **others** sin is never obvious when **I** choose to sin. The point the writer is making to these Christians is simple, though a bit humbling to face. If there is any situation in my life, including my difficult marriage, where I want something **more** than I want to obey Father God, I will never be able to **hear** God's will or **receive** His divine help. Discontented people are the most **unteachable** and **unreachable** people on the face of the earth.

We need to drill down deeper on this point. The opposite of **contentment** is **covetousness**. I can be covetous of **wealth** and **that** will keep me from hearing God and destroy my marriage. I can be covetous of another **partner** and **that** will keep me from hearing God and destroy my marriage. I can be covetous of my **freedom** and **that** will keep me from hearing God and destroy my marriage.

But the basic root problem in each of these cases is exactly the same. If at some point - **especially** in my marriage - there is something I have set my heart on **more** than I set my heart on doing the will of God - no matter how difficult His will may appear to be - at **that** point I render hearing from God impossible. Only a persistent, submissive contentment with the will of God keeps my soul's ears open to God's voice and my marriage open to His supernatural presence and help.

And that leads into my second point:

2) **THE LESS PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO AGREE WITH GOD ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGE, THE MORE THEY WILL BE CONVINCED THEY ALREADY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING**

Here we stand on the threshold of an absolute principle of spiritual deterioration. **The more people don't listen to God, the more they think they already know**. This is **always** true - one hundred percent of the time. This is why information alone can never truly solve spiritual problems. This is why there aren't enough books and seminars in the whole world to correct spiritual problems in marriages.

Don't misunderstand me. There are **some** marriage problems that **can** be totally turned around by seminars and counseling sessions. The couple mourning over the tragic death of a baby - the couple struggling with bad financial management - the spouse needing medical treatment for clinical

depression - **these** problems - and others like them - desperately need outside help.

But most of the marriage situations I encounter in the church don't come under this heading. Nine times out of ten marriages are suffering because of the **spiritual** rebellion of one or both of the partners. And then, to dodge the helping grace God **would** bring to that marriage, they start to tell themselves lies. And, because the more we **don't** listen to God the more we think we already know, one partner or the other will convince himself or herself that God has another way for them. God's grace will simply wash over all the rebellion. (We're going to look specifically at the kinds of lies we tell ourselves in another teaching in this series).

What I'm calling for in this teaching is the **carefulness of the saints**. The nature of all sin is it deadens our desire to repent. Sinners **after** marriage are no different from sinners **before** marriage. Sinners quickly grow to **like** being sinners.

All that marriage does is **multiply the ways in which my sinful nature can manifest itself**. Marrying someone - even another Christian - doesn't make me more spiritually mature than I was when I was single. So I think you can see my call is to **all** Christians. You can only get ready to **be** married (if that's God's call for your life) while you are still **single**. Practice listening to God. Practice dying to self.

Above all, practice **contentment** with the will of Father God. Practice shutting out immediately all competing desires and affections. Practice doing the part of God's will that seems most impossible to your natural self. That's the best way to enter marriage with a godly heart. And as far as I can tell, there is no other way to **get a deep marriage** and to **stay married for life**.