

HEBREWS 13:4. (EHV)

Marriage is to be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers.

Last week we covered the basics of Christian ethics. As we now dig deeper into Christian living, it only makes sense to start with the Christian home. After all, the home was where God started. Before there was government, before there was church, there was a home, a family. Adam was the first governor and the first pastor because he was first and foremost the first husband and eventually the first father. When Peter preached on Pentecost about how Christ's church would spread, he said that it would primarily spread through Christian families. "The promise is for you and for your children." Without family and home, everything else breaks down.

So this morning let's search the Scriptures and talk about the Christian home—its foundation, its organization, and its goals.

1. Foundation

First we need to ask, "What is the foundation of the Christian home?" The writer to the Hebrews identifies that foundation for us. "Marriage is to be held in honor by all." He says that marriage should be held in honor by all because marriage is the foundation of the Christian home, and really of all society. Think of what society would be without marriage. Either there would be no children and humanity would die out after one generation, or if people only had children outside of marriage, the world would be completely dysfunctional and chaotic and would either steadily destroy itself after just a few generations, or it would be fertile ground for a tyrant to step in and rule as he pleased because the people were desperate for any sort of leader.

Marriage is the foundation of the Christian home. But what exactly is marriage? About seven years ago, back when I was still on Facebook, I noticed that a number of my Facebook friends and their friends were participating in a Love Your Spouse 7-Day Challenge. Someone would nominate someone else, let's say a woman, to take this challenge. That woman was then supposed to post seven of her favorite pictures of her and your husband together, one each day for seven days. Another component developed too—the person would add a different reason why he or she loved his or her spouse on each of the seven days.

The people who took that challenge were wonderful people. And the challenge certainly had many good results. It's certainly good for married couples to take time to think about the good traits of other people, especially those of their spouse, and to express their appreciation for them. That's keeping the Eighth Commandment.

But in all of the earthly reasons I saw for why people loved their spouse, not once did I see the one main earthly reason. I saw reasons like: My spouse lets me drag her to concerts I want to attend. My spouse is passionate about his job. My spouse likes to act goofy with me. My spouse lets me have some time for myself when I need it. But friends, what if those things cease to be true at some point in the future? What if a life-changing experience or a life-altering accident or the onset of old age or ba-humbugism about life or whatever else took all those traits away from your spouse? Would that mean it was time to stop loving him or her? Would that mean it was time not to be married anymore?

Especially those of you who are married, please don't forget the primary earthly reason you love your spouse and are married to your spouse. The primary *spiritual* reason for any and all love is always the same: We love because God first loved us. If God didn't love us first, or we didn't know of God's love for us, it would be impossible for us to show any true love for anyone else. But the primary *earthly* reason for married love is not because of any trait in the other person; those traits might have brought you together in the first place, but those traits might change in the future. The primary earthly reason you love your spouse is simply because you have decided and promised to love your spouse. You love your spouse because you have made a commitment to your spouse. That's what marriage is all about—not about how the other person makes you feel, but about your commitment to each other.

We heard Jesus say it in the Gospel: “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will be one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate” (Matthew 19:5–6). Marriage is a legal, lifelong commitment, made before God and other humans, that one man and one woman make to each other. Only when the other person makes it absolutely clear that they have broken their side of the commitment does Jesus permit divorce, and the only evidence that Jesus gives for a clear breach of faith is sexual unfaithfulness, and the apostle Paul includes willful abandonment as part of that.

Of course, God didn't institute this union to make us miserable. There are indeed many blessings that are meant to come with marriage. Many of the things people mentioned in the Love Your Spouse Challenge showcased the blessings of marriage, but the three primary blessings God mentions in his Word are companionship, sexual intimacy, and children. I still remember attending the wedding of one of my friend, and at the reception his wife's great-grandfather, who was in his 80s or 90s, one eye drooping lower than the other, stood up to give a speech. He spoke of these three blessings and added, “But the greatest of these is companionship.” Everyone could tell he was not only speaking from the Scriptures, but also from a lifetime of experience, and I'm sure he was right.

But this morning let me take a moment to highlight that second blessing, sexual intimacy, because the writer to the Hebrews highlights it here. God intended marriage, and marriage alone, to be the context in which sexual intimacy takes place. If it takes place outside of that context, there are always consequences. I have heard Christians ask, “Where does God say you can't have intimate relations before marriage?” I have heard of Lutheran church members who look at their pastor as if he just fell from Mars when he tells them the their intimate relations are sinful because they are not married. So please listen carefully, because here is where God says it, and the writer to the Hebrews could not state it any more clearly: “Marriage is to be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers.”

First the writer summarizes it: The marriage bed should be kept undefiled; that is, the only bed on which intimate relations should be taking place is a bed occupied by a man and a woman married to each other. He then spells that out by naming the consequences: God will judge adulterers—that is, people who sleep with someone else besides their spouse *after* marriage—and God will judge all the sexually immoral—that is, anyone who sleeps with

someone else *before* marriage and anyone who seeks the pleasure meant to come with marriage in any other way outside of marriage.

Parents, please stress this to your children. If your children are having intimate relations with someone else outside of marriage and don't think it's a big deal, don't repent of their sin, God will judge them. It's that simple.

2. Organization

Second, we need to ask, "Who is responsible for the conduct and welfare of the Christian home, or how is the Christian home organized?" Ephesians 6 tells us that parents in general are responsible, both the father and the mother, but the Creation account, Ephesians 5 and 6, Colossians 3, and other places in Scripture tell us that the husband is responsible above all. Wives, if your husbands are not fulfilling their God-given role, then yes, you may and should step in and see to it that your children are being raised in the training and instruction of the Lord. But woe to that father for whom that is the case! And if your husband is doing his best to fulfill his God-given role, then you are to do your best to help and assist him in doing so.

Men, God did not make us so that everyone around us could serve as our slaves and enable us to do as we please. The essence of manhood is not getting your way, staying out late, watching sports, drinking beer, and telling and laughing at dirty jokes. God made us so that we could work hard and set an example and train up the next generation of humans to give glory to God, and so that we could show our families and the world what selfless, Christ-like love looks like.

It should also be mentioned here that there usually comes a time when the tables are turned and children have to take care of their parents because they are no longer able to take care of themselves. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5, "If anyone does not provide for his own family, and especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Jesus does not want us to be like the countless people who dump their aging parents off in a nursing home and never see them again until they're lying in a casket.

3. Goals

Third, we need to ask, "What are the goals of a Christian home?" Parents, have you ever asked yourself that question? There are mission statements at businesses, at schools, even at churches, but have you ever asked yourself, "What is our family's mission?" Too often a family has no goal, or its goal is to work together so that the family can prosper financially as much as possible, or its goal is to give each other all the best opportunities possible, even at the expense of their spiritual welfare. I've heard it from pastor after pastor that one of the most prominent idols in our culture today is our children. We spend all our time running around like chickens with our heads cut off in order to give them the best, but how well do they know their Savior?

Paul reminds us that "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin" (1 Timothy 6:9). Jesus reminds us, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul behind it with all the possessions and all the medals, trophies, and certificates. Jesus also reminds us that our heavenly Father, who takes care of the birds and the flowers, knows what all our needs are, better than we do, and will certainly take care of us (Matthew 6:25-34). So our primary goal is to seek first our

heavenly Father's kingdom and his righteousness. Our primary goal is to give glory to him by trusting in his Son Jesus and doing our best to live in accordance with his will. If that is our primary goal, God promises that he will see to it that the rest takes care of itself, and *everyone* who has made that the primary goal of their family can attest to that.

Why is Jesus so concerned about our family and what happens in our home? For two reasons: First, this is one of the main ways Jesus takes care of us. When children are ill-adjusted or don't turn out right, as we say, to what can we almost always trace it back? It's usually (though not always) because there was something wrong in the home. Maybe the father wasn't there for the child in one way or another. Maybe the relationship between the father and mother was strained or worse. Maybe there was no discipline. Maybe there was physical abuse. Maybe the family was dysfunctional in some other way. And as a result, the child grows up not knowing how to take care of himself or herself, or how to interact with others, or has trouble distinguishing between right and wrong and doing what is right.

But second and most importantly, God intended the family to be a reflection and illustration of his relationship with us. God wants a parent's attitude and actions toward their children to be a picture of his own toward us. God wants a husband's relationship with his wife to be a picture of his Son's relationship with those who believe in him. If we don't learn what love, patience, and loving discipline are like at home, what are the odds that we will learn it elsewhere? If we don't learn what forgiveness is at home, what are the odds that we will learn it outside the home, or the odds that we will understand what it means that Jesus has *completely forgiven* all of our lust and adultery and divorce and sexual idolatry and unwholesome talk and hatred and abuse and abortion and disrespect and disobedience and lack of discipline and all of the other sins that take place in the realm of home life? How are we going to grasp that, brothers and sisters, if we have no model for it in the home?

That's why God's will for the Christian home is so important. But guess what, friends? Even if the home we grew up in was a complete failure, it *is* still possible to learn and grasp and practice love and forgiveness and patience and discipline, because we will always have *God's* household as a model. We will always have the relationship between God the Father and God the Son as a model, and we will always have the relationship between Christ and his believers as a model. That's why Paul doesn't say, "Husbands, love your wives, just like your father loved your mother." No, he says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" [Ephesians 5:25–27]. That is why Paul doesn't say, "Forgive each other as your parents forgave each other, and as you and your siblings forgave each other growing up." What a horrible model that would be! No, he says, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" [Colossians 3:13]. That is why God says through the prophet Isaiah, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? *Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*" [Isaiah 49:15].

Always keep God's love for you in Christ in focus. Then more and more you will honor marriage as God wants, and more and more you will gladly and willingly follow God's will for you in your home. God grant it to us for Jesus's sake. Amen.