



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 13th October 2019

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 13: 4-6

Subject: Part 45 – What's love got to do with it – Part 2.

Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. ⁵ Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Last week we looked at Christian love in action. According to the text, love begins with Jesus, continues with others, further continues in our love for strangers be they Christian or not, even how we can demonstrate love towards those who are imprisoned and who are ill-treated. We noted last week that love, and our relationship with God, has to do with everything in our attitudes and our conduct, which determines our behaviour. Now we come to verse 4 to 6, we will be looking at marriage, covetousness and the solution.

These important areas need addressing from a Biblical perspective to any age, culture, and time. The world has its own interpretation on all these things which is mostly contra to the biblical teachings. Whenever the church allows these distorted views to creep in, then the church's value system changes, and it

becomes compromised. And we know from experience, a compromised church is a dangerous church to be in. Just read Revelation chapter 2 to see what Jesus has to say on the matter.

Verse 4 – tells us

Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Today, Marriage is not so clear cut. In some cultures, it can be a temporary convenience while in others, it doesn't matter who or what you love or even how many! This is why we must understand God's perspective and take it to heart, but even more than that, we must intertwine it into our everyday conduct. Some in the early church held a view that celibacy was a holier state than marriage. Some men, such as the famous Origen of the third century, had themselves castrated, under the mistaken notion that they could thereby serve God more devotedly. That is not the bible's position. Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 that in the last days apostate teachers would "forbid marriage". But God holds marriage not only to be permissible, but honourable, and we are to have the same high regard for it.

God created marriage prior to the fall which we can read about Genesis 2. Therefore marriage is holy, lawful and honourable. It was made a honourable covenant between one man and one woman. God honours marriage, Jesus' first miracle was at a marriage and the Holy Spirit illustrates the church as the bride of Christ. When Jesus comes again, we will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Marriage is very important to God. The whole Trinity testifies that marriage is honourable. No person, therefore, is justified in disparaging marriage.

Scripture gives at least three reasons for marriage.

1. Marriage is for the propagation of children. At creation, mankind was commissioned to

"be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

2. Marriage is also provided as a means of preventing sexual sin.

"Because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2).

Paul advises, and then goes on to counsel the unmarried and widows to marry if they do not have self-control (vv. 8-9).

3. Marriage is also provided for companionship.

"God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18).

There are a many ways that biblical marriage can be held in honour. One of the ways is that the husband is to be the head of the family. This doesn't mean that he is the dictator and everyone must do everything he says or there are consequences, but it means that he takes his God given responsibility to take care of his family and lead his family in a loving way. There are many men who do not take their role in the marriage seriously enough nor do they take their spiritual role literally enough. God is glorified in a family where the husband rules graciously and fairly, and leads by example.

"Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

"The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23).

While men are to love their wives, wives are to be submissive to their husbands as Sarah was to Abraham (1 Peter 3:1&6). Submission (*hupotasso in the Greek*) means to get under and lift up, or to put in order. Sarah could be submissive to Abraham because he was submissive to God and loved Sarah as she should be

loved. A wife can be submissive to her husband a lot easier when she can trust him and he takes his roles seriously. It is very hard for a wife to be submissive if the husband can't be trusted, he doesn't lead, is unkind, quick to anger, unloving or indifferent.

Marriage is honoured by being regulated by mutual love and respect.

"You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honour as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3 verse 7).

The concern of both husband and wife should centre on the welfare and happiness of the other, on what can be given rather than on what can be obtained.

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Therefore in the light of understanding what marriage is and why it is so honourable, it follows that fornicators and adulterers will be judged by God. This verse is addressing sexual purity. God is very serious about sexual purity.

Our society today believes in liberal sexual expression. In fact we live in a changed cultural where it is encouraged, they see that they are perfectly within their rights and we often hear, *sure God is love and doesn't mind who you love once its love and you respect the other*. This attitude is also being taught to young children in schools.

But in the eyes of God, sexual expression outside of marriage as God created in the garden of Eden, is always sin and will always be judged. Paul warned,

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6).

The apostle also tells us to

"flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

"Immorality" (porneia) is from the same basic Greek word as fornicators (pornos). So fornication means every kind of sexual expression outside of marriage. Adultery is a married person fornicating, whether is with a single person or another married person.

God warns that anyone who does these things will be judged. Judgment and consequences already exists such as broken lives, broken families, compromised characters, psychological and physical break downs, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, venereal diseases of all sorts, violence, even murder. It is not possible to live and act against the moral grain of the universe established by God and not suffer terrible consequences.

When Christians are immoral, the immediate consequences may even be worse, because the testimony of the gospel is polluted. I knew a Pastor who told me something that illustrates this point. There was a new Christian who came into his colleague's (another pastor) office and she was obviously shaken. After a while, she told him that when she started attending the church youth group, the leader of the group asked her out on a date. She was flattered and thrilled to be going out with a Christian. "How different it will be from what I'm used to," she thought. But before the night was over, he had destroyed her purity, shattered her faith, and ruined his own testimony. The last time the pastor heard from the girl, her life was still a shambles. Within marriage, sex is beautiful, fulfilling, creative. Outside marriage from God's perspective, it is ugly, destructive, and damning.

"But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Ephesians 5:3).

The sexual revolution that happened from the 1960's was not about liberation in the sense of pure freedom but in fact it was enslavement, the murder of the innocent and the destruction of Biblical values. The world embraced and accepted it, not knowing the price it would have to pay later on. In fact, we are still paying for it not just spiritually, but morally and financially and every other way. Recent news reports of young people behaving criminally against young girls is appalling when you take into account the age of the offenders, children themselves. When we lower the barrier, the flood waters come flooding in and that's what's happening in society today. When the God of Scripture is replaced with the god of men then Romans 1:18-32 occurs. Let me read it to you from the Amplified Version, as we do note how up to date it is. I make no apology for reading God's Word.

¹⁸ For God's [holy] wrath and indignation are revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who in their wickedness repress and hinder the truth and make it inoperative. ¹⁹ For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [Himself] has shown it to them. ²⁰ For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made (His handiworks). So [men] are without excuse [altogether without any defence or justification], ²¹ Because when they knew and recognized Him as God, they did not honour and glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. But instead they became futile and godless in their thinking [with vain imaginings, foolish reasoning, and stupid speculations] and their senseless minds were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools [professing to be smart, they made simpletons of themselves]. ²³ And by them the glory and majesty and excellence of the immortal God were exchanged for and represented by images, resembling mortal man and birds and beasts and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their [own] hearts to

sexual impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves [abandoning them to the degrading power of sin],

²⁵ Because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever! Amen (so be it).

²⁶ For this reason God gave them over and abandoned them to vile affections and degrading passions. For their women exchanged their natural function for an unnatural and abnormal one, ²⁷ And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze (burning out, consumed) with lust for one another—men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong-doing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution.

²⁸ And so, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God or approve of Him or consider Him worth the knowing, God gave them over to a base and condemned mind to do things not proper or decent but loathsome,

²⁹ Until they were filled (permeated and saturated) with every kind of unrighteousness, iniquity, grasping and covetous greed, and malice. [They were] full of envy and jealousy, murder, strife, deceit and treachery, ill will and cruel ways. [They were] secret backbiters and gossipers, ³⁰ Slanderers, hateful to and hating God, full of insolence, arrogance, [and] boasting; inventors of new forms of evil, disobedient and undutiful to parents.

³¹ [They were] without understanding, conscienceless and faithless, heartless and loveless [and] merciless. ³² Though they are fully aware of God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them themselves but approve and applaud others who practice them.

I don't know about you, but that last verse is chilling to me, it can't be ignored. This is not done in ignorance's but in open defiance's towards God and His people, the church. What we are looking at today is God's judgment, what will it be like when the Holy Spirit as we understand His ministry for today is removed, what then? Revelation 6 and onwards.

William MacDonald wrote – ***“Unless it is pardoned through the blood of Christ, He will judge it in eternal fire”***

That's the good news.. there is a pardon available if they turn to Him and acknowledge where they are at in their sin, and ask for forgiveness. Now-a-days, talking about these things is hugely offensive, but when you look at it, does the passage invite us to hate anyone who fornicates or committes adultery? No. Does the passage invite us to honour the bible's definition of marriage? Yes.

This brings us to verses 5a where there is an exhortation of what not to do and the solution.

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.

These verses are about our conduct. Covetousness is greed, grasping, showing a strong desire especially for material possessions. Covetous implies inordinate desire often for another's possessions. Exodus 20 verse 17 –

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's."

Love, true love, as defined by the bible cannot be motivated by covetousness. We know many people who are greedy, but how many people actual are honest enough to say that they suffer from it. This is what C. H. Spurgeon observed,

"I've been in a lot of testimony meetings, and I've heard a lot of people share how they've sinned, and I've had people come to me and make confession of sin. But in all my life I've never had one person confess the sin of covetousness to me."

You do not have to acquire a lot of things to be covetous. In fact you do not have to acquire anything at all. Covetousness is an attitude; it is wanting to acquire things, longing for them, setting our thoughts and attention on them, whether

we ever possess them or not. Covetousness stalls spiritual growth and makes it almost impossible to love others. It brings spiritual progress to a stop, why? Because you want something more than holiness. It makes your relationship with God nearly impossible and your love impractical. People can be covetous after many different things, such as: money, power, relationships, even religious experiences.

When John D. Rockefeller was a young man, a friend asked him how much money he wanted. He said "A million dollars". After he had earned a million dollars, the friend asked him again how much money he wanted. The answer this time was, "Another million." Covetousness and greed follow a principle of increasing desire and decreasing satisfaction, a form of the law of diminishing returns.

"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity" (Ecclesiastics 5:10).

The more you get the more you want. When we focus on material things, our having will never catch up with our wanting. Love of money is one of the most common forms of covetousness, partly because money can be used to secure so many other things that we want. Loving money is lusting after material riches or power, whatever the form is. There are many examples of this in the bible. From Achan's love of money in Joshua 7 to Elisha's servant in 2 Kings 5:15-27, right up to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Greed is not a trifling sin before God. It has kept many unbelievers out of the kingdom, and it has caused many believers to lose the joy of the kingdom, or worse such as a good relationship with God, even their testimony.

So what is the solution for covetousness? Contentment. We are told in the verse and we being to see what is the relationship between love, contentment and the

presence of God? God's love to us is made manifest in God's Provision, Protection and Presence. Therefore the solution to covetousness or greed is contentment, contentment with God and what God has given you. It is not wrong, of course, to earn or to have such things as wealth. But it is important to have a right attitude and relationship towards them and put them in their rightful place. Remember, covetousness is a lie, because you will never have enough. Benjamin Franklin once said

“Who is rich? He that is content. Who is that? Nobody.”

But Franklin obviously didn't know those who read God's word and took that godliness with contentment is great gain. The moment you know, take it on board and believe it, liberations takes place. Contentment is the solution for covetousness. But for some it can take time to learn, or, to take this message on board. Martin Luther said once

“Next to faith, this is the highest art, to be content with the calling in which God has placed you. I have not learned it yet!”

Contentment doesn't have to be that your cup runn*it* over. It is learning to be satisfied, being grateful for what you have. Steve Brown put it very well when he said – ***“A little is a lot, if it is enough.”*** When we are looking at what we don't have, is usually when we run into trouble. We are looking at what the Joan's have instead of looking at God, at what Jesus has done for us, at what he gives to us or even concentrating on living lives that are in the pursuit of holiness and peace which we were told to do in chapter 12. John Piper wrote – ***“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”***

So it gets to a point when we need to set our priorities straight. What is life about? Is it about what we have or who we trust? Thankfully God has given us

not just the knowledge but also the reason for contentment right here in the second part of verse 5 and 6 –

For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”⁶ So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

Verse 5b comes from Deuteronomy 31 verse 6 to 8 which says:

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”⁷ Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.”⁸ And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

The language used here is emphatic. God is essential saying there is no way, no how, ever, will He leave you alone. Nothing can separate us from His love. Then verse 6 is another quote from Psalm 118 verse 6 which says - ***The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*** That whole Psalm declares and extols the loving kindness of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews presses in the idea when He wrote – ***‘We can boldly say’***. There is a clear confidence that is informing us of how we can approach God and know that He is with us, His provision and His protection.

We need to remember what was at stake, what the risk was - Many of those addressed in the book of Hebrews had lost most, or all, of their material possessions, even community because they knew they had ***“a better possession and an abiding one”*** (10:34). Some of them might have been longing to get back what they lost, thinking the cost was too high. They are told not to return to trust in material things. They may have felt like they were giving up everything

for Jesus, but the writer is saying *no*... you are getting everything in Jesus. There is nothing that you have lost that is of any comparison to what you have gained in Christ.

We confidently say, ***"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"***

Just think about that response for a moment? Is that the one that most people would be happy with? What about justice, rights, getting your own back? Their loss was not the result of negligence on their part but of faith. It was taken from them with force and power, they were made destitute on account of their resolve not to deny Christ in any way. This is not just about provision of material things, but it is provision of security because with Jesus you have perfect security, perfect protection and perfect peace. Do you think that you can add anything else to that? Well you can, you can add all the other promises that we have been given in the Word of God. We need to take this on board, and really believe that – We possess the one who possesses all.

What more do you actually need? Paul wrote in Philippians 4 verse 19 –

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

He knows what we need even before we ask. He works behind the scenes to bring all things together for His glory and our good. But do we believe it? Maybe a more hard hitting question is, do we live our life with confidence of this knowledge or do we find ourselves on emotional roller-coasters, hoping and wishing that things will work out, or are we out with our own tool boxes trying to fix things up.

These verses are very insistence of what we should do and what we are to be like. If we have the Lord, we have it all. Loss of anything else can be no worse than a bad inconvenience, an inconvenience that, surrendered to the Lord, will always be for our good. Material possessions are temporary, anyway. We are going to lose them sooner or later. If the Lord decides we should lose them sooner, we should not worry.

Let us reflex our lives through these verses and see if our lives reflect what we say we belief. The world's standards are not ours, nor should they be ours. These principles are in fact the principles to peaceful and happy living, removing the stress and strain that many of us face in these days. God is the one we serve. As we have seen, He will not abandon us. He is our very present help in our times of testing or troubles. So be of good cheer.

Amen.