

That Blessed Union  
Hebrews 13:3-6

1 Peter 3:1-12

Psalm 23

Responsive Colossians 3:12-19

This morning we are back in Hebrews 13, we will be focusing on verses 2-6 Let us read our passage this morning, starting at verse 1, of chapter 13 reading to verse 6

So, again we are finishing out this book and the Author has taken a different tone in his writing, we see this continue in our passage that we are looking at this morning. He is laying out a series of wise teachings putting to application all that he has previously written about. Starting out today in verse 3, and in fact all of these verses here from the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse should be seen through the lens of the principle that was laid down in verse 1. Which is "To continue in brotherly love."

Honestly what we are seeing here in these following verses is just that principle put into practice. Let brotherly love continue, and entertain strangers, love your christian brothers and remember those in prison as if you were also there with them, and it is the same with marriage between 2 believers, for the love of God working in them binds them even closer together than any physical attraction or love. Just because a couple is married, does not mean that they are no longer brothers and sisters in Christ's body. In fact it is for this very reason that even in marriage it really needs to be God who is central in that relationship. For through an understanding of God's mercy, love, and grace, we too can be merciful, loving, and gracious when contentions arise.

For we are both a reflection of the very image of God which has been stamped upon our hearts. We are indwelt by the spirit, and out of the spirit flows all sorts of good things as Paul wrote. Should we not also see our spouses in this way? When it comes to an unbelieving spouse it of course becomes more difficult, for that forgiveness, that love, and grace that can only come from the spirit is lacking in one half of the equation. But as we all know we have been given wise biblical council on such things as well. The call to love our brothers as ourselves, does not only apply to fellow Christians, for right after Jesus said that, he also included that we should also love our neighbors, and the Lord our God, on these things hangs the whole law. On these things hangs righteousness...for our righteousness is not our own, but it is God working through us, and it is God through the spirit working in us to love our brothers and sisters, and to love our neighbors.

This same principle applies to an unbelieving spouse, for as much as we are able we are to love, and be merciful to them. But many I think take this to the extreme in the Christian faith and use this principle to justify even remaining with one who is abusive, or who has abandoned the marriage. But Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:10 "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the lord. A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife." Note that Paul is talking between 2 Christians, such a divorce or separation should not happen because of what I had said previously about the holy spirit working in us to love one another. Between 2 Christians there should not be such an animosity that it would lead to divorce, and I think that if such does happen for we do yet live in this world, and we are yet creatures who are stained by sin, then much of what scripture talks of divorce would apply, that each must remain unmarried, for remarrying would be adultery.

But marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is different, continuing on in 1 Corinthians, verse 12. "But to the rest I, not the Lord say; IF any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.” Notice the key here, lies with the unbelieving spouse. If the unbelieving spouse is unwilling to live with the other, this is a case of abandonment, and Paul goes on to say in verse 15, “but if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

Today marriage is looked at as almost being a temporary thing. The divorce rates seem to keep climbing generation after generation, and we are now living in a society where marriage is the exception not the norm, many chose to forgo marriage because it is easier to break off the relationship without the legal binding aspect of marriage. There seems to be not much commitment anymore. As we have seen throughout scripture the church is called the bride of Christ, the relationship between Christ and his followers is likened to a husband and a wife, just like most things given in scripture one thing is a reflection of another, such as marriage is a reflection of our relationship with Christ. So, the marriage covenant being reflective of God's covenant with the church as you can see is something that God takes quite seriously, which is why throughout scripture there is instruction that a husband and wife are to be bound together, and not divorce.

But there is the other side of the coin, in the relationship between God and man, it is the unbeliever who denies Christ, it is the unbeliever who is faithless. Despite all that God gives, and does, the unbeliever in their rebellion against God, have separated themselves from God. In the same way is this reflection of the unbelieving spouse who abandons the marriage. God is not to blame for sinful fallen humanity, though he loves his creation, as it says in Matthew, “he makes it to rain on the just, and the unjust.” Yet he is not to blame for fallen humanity, just as a spouse who's unbelieving partner abandons the relationship and leaves the marriage is not to be put to blame, as Paul says, they are no longer under that bondage.

This principle applies as well to abusive relationships, for it is the same principle. Abuse is a form of abandonment, the abusive spouse is no longer acting out of love, and in fact I argue because of the simple fact that those who are Christs have the spirit operating in them to will and to do those things which are pleasing to God, any spouse who is abusive, is an unbeliever, for the spirit of love, through God is not there. Abuse is the antithesis of all that God stands for, so in short, yes, abuse is a valid and clear biblical reason to seek separation and divorce from a spouse. Marriage is an image of God and his relationship with his church, these things such as abuse, or abandonment should not happen for it sullies that image but we are yet sinful creatures who live in a fallen world so God has made an allowance for divorce as Jesus says in Matthew, because of the hardness of our hearts Moses permitted it.

Looking again here at verse 4, which says, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” Those who are untrue, those who have abandoned, God will judge. Throughout the old Testament he refers to himself as a husband to Israel, but in the hardness of their hearts, often times they would turn from God. The word of God speaking through the prophets would call them an adulterous generation, who would turn to false Gods, who would turn to Idols, who would pervert, and sully that which God set forth for holiness. Even in the later days, in the time of Christ nothing had changed, they had chose to worship the image instead of the substance.

Our God is a jealous God, and worshiping and turning to anything that is not him, is an adultery, or fornication of the highest count. In the Marriage relationship both the husband and the wife benefit from the relationship, and there is no higher or greater betrayal then that of adultery.

The message such conduct gives to the spouse is that you are not satisfied, or that they are not good enough, it is an act of betrayal and really, hatred toward the one you have given yourself and promised to love. So to is it the same with the church, not only corporately.. but also individually. Each and every one of us are married to Christ, so what does this say about our relationship with Christ if we turn from him?

It says the same thing, it says that he is not enough for us, that we need something more, is this not what the Hebrews were doing with the Angel worship? Or the Galatians being drawn back into the bondage of the law, or the Israelites when they would turn to idols? The message that is given through such actions is that God is not all sufficient, that the God who holds the universe in his hand is not enough, the very God who sent his Son to die in your place hasn't done enough for you so you seek for more. Do you see how vial this is, do yo see what sort of a rebellion this is? It is a trampling of God's love underfoot, it is a equating God's love toward you as a thing to be tossed aside at your convenience.

This is not the actions of a loving spouse, but rather of one who is bitter, and selfish, and God says, that these adulterers and fornicators he will judge. In this marriage image that we are given in 1 Corinthians, it is God who is the faithful husband who remains undefiled when the spouse abandons and leaves. Throughout the old testament, we see God being faithful to Israel, despite their proclivity to seemingly always wanting to turn to something other then him. In our own relationships are we not justified to judge those who abandon us? Are we not justified in cutting off those who seek to do us harm? If the unbelieving spouse has abandoned the relationship, if they are abusive, or adulterous we are justified in that divorce, and likewise God is justified in the judgment of all those who do not see him as their husband, one who is worthy to be faithful to, for he is all sufficient.

And all of this flows beautifully into verse 5, which says, "Let your conduct by without covetousness; be content with the things that you have. For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Is this not the heart of the issue of adultery? Not being content, not being satisfied, coveting, and lusting after another. And look what he says, be content with what you have for he says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. All that we have comes from him, should we not be content with what he has given? And look at this promise! Once we have entered into that marriage with Christ, he will never leave us, he will remain faithful always, even despite our own sin he is willing and ready to forgive if we repent.

There are many who are law focused in their understanding of God's relationship with mankind, they believe that if there is no law that there is only chaos. How will one conduct oneself, and how will one know how to conduct oneself in the faith if there is no law? This is the questions asked of those of us who hold to a New Covenant understanding of scripture, of those of us who say that the Mosaic law has passed, and is no longer relevant, or binding to the christian. But I ask, what do we see here? We do not see law, but we see instruction as to these things which should be defining characteristics of those who are of faith. We should be bound together in brotherly love, not despising one another, not bitter, not full of selfish ambition, but rather willing to sacrifice ourselves for each other.

These verses speak to all of this, that which the Author is laying forth here is not law, but rather principles and instruction for the believer. And all of these things are encapsulated in the first statement of love. Out of Love do not forget to entertain strangers, out of love marriage is honorable, out of love we are to be satisfied with what God has given, not covet for more, but rest in his providing love.

And we do this all out of love, because God has first loved us with such a great love that while we were his enemies, while we despised and hated him, he showed such grace and mercy toward us that he sent his son to die to pay the penalty of our rebellion, so that we maybe reconciled, and married to him, so that he may enter into this new covenant with us, which is bound by his love toward us.

This is why there is no longer a need for the old covenant, for this new covenant that binds us with God through this love is far superior to the one which bound us by law. For with this new covenant comes the willingness and ability to love in return, and that love produces in itself the righteous acts expected by those who claim the name of Christ. We do not conduct our lives out of a fear of judgment for breaking God's law, we do so out of a love for him because of what he has done for us. The Psalmist wrote, "You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over." God has chosen his people, his anointed ones, they are special to him, they are precious to him and he pours into them grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness...so much so that our cup over flows....God's love toward us should shine forth, should overflow in our hearts and pour out to all of those around us.

God said he would never leave us, nor forsake us, for he chose us, he anointed us, and he will provide for us, so surely goodness and mercy shall follow, and we shall dwell in the house of the lord all the days of our life. Worshiping, praising, giving glory to God who took us, who were once fornicators, and whores, seeking only to please ourselves, lusting after our own desires, God has taken, made clean, has anointed us with the precious, priceless covering of his blood, so that we maybe in this marriage covenant of love with him. How beautiful is this? That he would take something so vial, so lost in a bondage of sin, and by his own power through his own will desire us, cleanse us, and make us to be his.

There is no such love greater then the love of God for his people. There is no greater covenant then the one he has given in his Son, and there is no greater marriage then that which is between God and the church. There is nothing more beautiful in his eyes, then us, the redeemed. God has taken the broken, and has made them whole, God has taken that which is filthy and undesirable and has turned it into something of great beauty, he has set us apart and said..you, are mine..and I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, I have loved you, and will always love you. He is our great protector, he is the one who is all sufficient, he is the one who provides, and all we must do in return is love him. He is worthy of worship and love beyond that which we are even capable, and we do often fall short, yet he remains faithful, yet he remains loving.

We are married to Christ, we are his bride, and he our husband. In love for us, He provides, with great power and strength he protects, and in faith, we find safety and comfort in his arms. So that we, may as verse 6 say, "The Lord is my helper, but he is more then that, the Lord is our husband, what should we fear? What can anyone do to us with this God who loves us so by our side, who will never leave nor forsake us. If our earthly fathers, and our earthly husbands provide protection, how much more so will our heavenly father, and our heavenly husband? The one whom out of one lump of fallen humanity formed for himself, to be his bride, his prize, his joy. Wow, what love, what mercy, what grace....we owe him everything, but not out of some idea of a debt that we must repay, or out of some understanding of requirement or law, but simply because we love him so that we give him our all, because all that we have he has given us.

This should be reflective in our own lives, and in our own marriage. The Marriage relationship is not a 50/50 trade, but it is a 100 percent commitment to one another. We are to give our all to our spouses just has God has given his all to his bride, the church. And in all of this is a beautiful reflection of God's love, of his sacrifice, of his provision, his protection, and the closeness of our relationship to him.

