

Hebrews 13:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but
whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Analysis

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. This verse affirms marriage's sanctity and sexual purity while warning against sexual immorality. 'Marriage is honourable in all' (timios ho gamos en pasin, τίμιος ὁ γάμος ἐν πᾶσιν) declares marriage universally honorable—for all people, in all cultures, at all times. 'The bed undefiled' (kai hē koitē amiantos) specifically affirms that sexual intimacy within marriage is pure, holy, and God-honoring.

The contrast with 'whoremongers and adulterers' (pornous kai moichous, πόρνους καὶ μοιχοὺς) distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate sexuality. Sexual expression belongs exclusively within marriage covenant; all other sexual activity constitutes sin. 'God will judge' (krinei ho theos, κρινεῖ ὁ θεός) promises divine judgment on sexual immorality, whether seemingly unpunished in this life.

This challenges modern culture's sexual libertinism and also historical heresies that denigrated marriage and sexuality (Gnosticism, some monasticism). God designed sexuality for marriage; within that covenant it's pure and good; outside it, it's sin deserving judgment. Reformed theology affirms both celibacy and marriage as honorable callings but rejects sexual activity outside marriage as rebellion against Creator's design. The warning about judgment should motivate both personal purity and church discipline regarding sexual sin.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture featured widespread sexual immorality—prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, and sexual slavery were common. Mystery religions incorporated sexual acts into worship. Greek philosophy sometimes viewed physical realm, including sexuality, as inferior to spiritual. Some early heresies (Gnosticism) taught that either

1. physical acts didn't matter spiritually, permitting licentiousness, or
2. material realm was evil, requiring asceticism including rejecting marriage.

Against both errors, Hebrews affirms marriage as honorable and marital sexuality as undefiled while condemning all extramarital sexual activity. Paul similarly defended marriage against false asceticism (1 Timothy 4:3) while condemning sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Early church needed clear sexual ethics amid pagan culture's promiscuity.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge both culture's sexual libertinism and false asceticism that denigrates marital sexuality?
2. What practical steps are you taking to honor marriage and maintain sexual purity in thought and action?
3. How should the warning of God's judgment on sexual immorality affect your personal holiness and church discipline?

Interlinear Text

Τίμιος	ὁ	γάμος	ἐν	πᾶσιν	καὶ	ἡ	κοίτη	ἀμίαντος
is honourable	G3588	Marriage	in	all	and	G3588	the bed	undefiled
G5093		G1062	G1722	G3956	G2532		G2845	G283
πόρνους	δὲ	καὶ	μοιχοὺς	κρινεῖ	ὁ	θεός		
whoremongers	but	and	adulterers	will judge	G3588	God		
G4205	G1161	G2532	G3432	G2919		G2316		

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 2:24 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Galatians 5:19 (Parallel theme): Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

Galatians 5:21 (References God): Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 5:13 (Judgment): But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

1 Corinthians 6:9 (References God): Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

Ephesians 5:5 (References God): For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

1 Corinthians 7:38 (Parallel theme): So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.

1 Timothy 3:4 (Parallel theme): One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

1 Timothy 3:12 (Parallel theme): Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Titus 1:6 (Parallel theme): If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

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