

June 19, 2011 by Steve Brandon



Avoiding the Pitfalls of Life

Hebrews 13:4-6

1. Marriage (verse 4)

2. Money (verses 5-6)

In our exposition of Hebrews, we have come to chapter 13, a very practical chapter of this book. After 12 chapters of lifting high the person and work of Jesus Christ, and giving us reason after reason after reason to follow Him, and warning us repeatedly of the consequences of failing to follow Him, we now come to some practical applications that flow from His greatness.

Last week, we looked at love. In the first three verses, we were told to love. Verse 1 told us to Love the brethren. Verse 2 instructed us to Love the strangers. Verse 3 said to Love the persecuted. Such is the character of those who follow after Jesus. We love others. We love others deeply and sacrificially.

And now, this morning, we focus upon two other areas of our lives: Marriage and Money. There is hardly anything that we deal with on a more consistent basis than these two things: Marriage and Money. For me, and for most of the adults here in this room, I deal with these things every day of my life. How to love Yvonne. How to spend the money I earn. My prayer for you today is that you might be helped in both of these areas of your life.

So, let's read the text:

Hebrews 13:4-6

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "the LORD is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

I remember in seminary being taught by a visiting speaker, who had many years of experience in the ministry. He warned us of some of the pitfalls of ministry. The three "G's," he called them: Girls, Gold, Glory. These are the dangers of all in ministry. Girls -- The seduction of women, away from your calling as a father and as a role model. Gold -- The seduction of wealth, which pulls our hearts away from heaven and down to this earth. Glory -- The seduction of power and influence, where you begin to think of yourself as more important than you ought to think. But, these pitfalls aren't merely for ministers or leaders. In Hebrews 13, they are laid out for us. They are for all of us. In our text this morning -- Hebrews 13:4-6 -- we see these pitfalls laid out for all of us.

This text nicely breaks into two areas of life: Marriage (verse 4) and Money (verses 5-6) In fact, next week, we will look at verses 7-14, which speak about ministry. Verse 7 says to, "Remember those who led you." Verse 9 warns, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings." But, it's marriage and money this week.

So, let's look at my first point.

1. Marriage (verse 4)

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

I have three observations from this text. First, **Marriage is to be honored**. I trust that you can see it there in verse 4, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all." That is, we should uphold the institution of marriage. We should uphold those who are married. We should honor husbands. We should honor wives. We should honor fathers. We should honor mothers.

How appropriate it was for us to honor our fathers on this day. It's a recognition of marriage. It's a recognition of God's plan for the family.

One of my visions for Rock Valley Bible Church is that we would be filled with solid families. Families where husbands love their wives like Christ loved the church. Families where husbands give themselves in complete service to their wives and to their family, and not their own lusts. Families where wives respect their husbands. Families where wives joyfully serve their husbands, as the church serves Christ. Families where both mom and dad are happy and content. Families where the children in those homes grow up saying, "When I grow up, I want to have a marriage like mom and dad's."

Yvonne and I are working toward this. Almost 19 years, we have been married. We have lived together in happiness. Yvonne means more to me (and more to this church) than any of you will ever know. She is a true helper to me.

One way to honor marriage is to speak well of your marriage and your experience of marriage. Lift high your marriage and tell others of the joys you have experienced. Don't lie -- work hard to develop a marriage you enjoy.

Jokes about marriage abound. On the one hand, they are funny. But on the other hand, they bring the institution of marriage down. "It is true that all men are born free and equal, but some of them get married." "A happy marriage is a matter of giving and taking; the husband gives and the wife takes." "A husband is living proof that a wife can't take a joke." "Marriage is an institution, but who wants to live in an institution?" "Marriage is like a hot bath; once you get used to it, it's not so hot." "'Marriage' means commitment. Of course, so does 'insanity'." "I have had some words with my wife, and she has had some paragraphs with me." [\[1\]](#)

There are really simple ways to honor marriage. One is to always speak kindly to your spouse. Even if there is conflict, it's to be handled in love, not in rage. Speak well of your spouse. Men, never speak down about your wife. Wives, never speak down about your husband. Those who speak poorly of their husbands (or their wives) are dishonoring marriage and are painting a poor picture for their children.

Honor those who are married. Take great care in how you deal with other married people. Don't spend time along with another person's spouse (of the opposite sex). Be careful how you relate to others. Do all that you can to help another's marriage.

Millie Dienert worked with Billy Graham for 40 years. Her comments on the ethics of Mr. Graham, Cliff Barrows, George Beverly Shea, and the rest of the male members of the team make the point:

I have always appreciated, from a moral point of view, how the men have been in their attitude toward the secretaries. The doors are always open. There is a high regard for the lack of any kind of privacy where a boss and his secretary are involved. At times, I thought they were going a little too far, that it wasn't necessary, but I'm glad they did it, especially today. They have kept everything above reproach. When you are working on a long-term basis with the same person, constantly, in hotels, where the wife is not there and the secretary is, that is a highly explosive situation. You have to take precautions. I have always respected the way they have handled that. It has been beautifully done.

Steve Farrar comments, "What a remarkable compliment. When it comes to avoiding the ambush of another woman, that's the kind of record we need to shoot for." [\[2\]](#)

Our culture continues to pound away on this issue. They won't stop until they have won. They won't stop until they redefine marriage, and thereby dishonor marriage. We live in a culture that is tearing marriage down. Let the church of Jesus Christ build up marriage.

We are called to honor marriage -- every single one of us. "Marriage is to be held in honor among all." No exception. Parents, children, spouses -- each are to value marriage.

This means that we should honor what God has established. And God has established marriage as one man with one woman for life. I trust that you remember the way that God instituted marriage. It was Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. "A man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). That's marriage. Two complementary parts coming together to make a whole. The woman was created to be a help to man. She was to complement him, not to compete with him. Her role can never be replaced by another man.

And yet, people in our culture are trying to do that all the time. They push same-sex legislation for same-sex marriage. They write articles and books. They influence the textbooks in our schools. They hold up banners at rallies seeking to subtly redefine marriage: "Love" + "Commitment" = Marriage. Now, indeed, for a healthy marriage, love and commitment need to be present. But, that's not the essence of how God has defined marriage.

Listen to what Jesus had to say about marriage. When questioned about marriage, Jesus said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).

One man with one woman for life. That's the way that God intended it to be. But, our culture is working hard to destroy this. Forty percent of those who are married for the first time will end up being divorced. Half of all marriages (first, second, and third) end in divorce. [\[3\]](#)

It's a sad reality of our day. It's a sad reality of some of you here this morning. And in situations where people have been crushed by divorce, you have tasted the bitter root.

We, as a church, need to do what we can do to save and help -- especially the children, that they may be rescued from the devastation that divorce brings to a home.

And also, please know, that for those of you who have been affected by divorce (among whom are many in this room), please know that divorce is not the unforgivable sin. Forgiveness is available to those who repent and trust in Jesus. In fact, that's what the book of Hebrews is all about. It lifts high the name of Jesus and shows how great He is. He is Jesus the Supreme One. He is greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron or any of the high priests. Through His death, He has inaugurated the New Covenant, whereby we can experience the forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 10:10 tells us, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." This includes those who have been divorced. Through Jesus, we can enter the holy place (Heb. 10:19). We need but believe and trust in Him.

Let's move on to my second observation. Not only is Marriage is to be honored. But also, **Marriage is to be pure**. I pull this straight from the second phrase in verse 4, "and the marriage bed is to be undefiled;"

This is speaking about sexual purity within marriage. The marriage bed is to be a place of purity. Nothing is to defile the marriage bed. And again, our society is doing everything that it can to destroy the purity of the marriage bed. Imagine taking a sack full of dirt and sprinkling it into your bed. That's what's taking place in our society today. The sexual revolution of the '60's continues strong today. Anybody, any place, any time. The more risky, the better.

Sleeping together before marriage is predominant in our society today. According to one study, 95% of Americans have had pre-marital sex. [4] It means that people come into marriage with a defiled bed. And, once married, many other things defile the bed as well, pornography being a chief culprit. What comes before your eyes? What comes into your minds? The bed is defiled by seeking gratification outside of the marriage bed and from there flows all sorts of sins.

Do you want to have a pure marriage bed? Then "flee from sexual immorality." This is the will of God for your life: "To abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3). Keep your bed pure.

Finally, my third observation, is that **Marriage will be judged**. Again, I pull these things from verse 4, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Fornication refers to sin before marriage. Adultery refers to sin after marriage. God will judge those who engage in such activities. Don't think that you can commit sexual sin and escape the notice of God. Your sin will find you out. By such sin, you have dishonored marriage. By such sin, you have polluted the marriage bed. By such sin, you have gone against the ways of God. God will deal with you.

But, listen -- and this is important -- as much as this comes in condemnation, I am a preacher of the gospel, giving hope. When the Bible says that "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge," the author is talking about unrepentant fornicators and adulterers. The case is entirely different for those who recognize their sin, and who know that it is wrong, and who confess it before the Lord. In their case, God will not judge such people.

Those who lived just after the days of Jesus in Corinth were like this. But, they repented and found grace and forgiveness at the cross.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Though the Corinthians, at one time, were engaged in all sorts of sinful activity, they repented and turned from their sin and were washed and sanctified. Through faith in Jesus Christ, they were justified before God.

So, if you are here today and feeling the weight of the moral standards that God requires of our marriages, and you have not honored marriage, your marriage bed is not pure, you have engaged in fornication and adultery, then know that forgiveness is available to you. Simply confess your sins and seek the Lord.

The promise of Hebrews is this: "Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Let's avoid the pitfalls of life. Let's avoid the pitfalls of Marriage (verse 4) Let's avoid the pitfalls of ...

2. Money (verses 5-6)

This comes in verses 5 and 6. We read, ...

Hebrews 13:5-6

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The LORD is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

Like in verse 4, I have three observations of these verses as well. The first observation is clear enough. **Don't love money**. Verse 5 says to, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money."

Handling money is one of the most tricky things than any of us will ever do. On the one hand, we need money. Without it, we cannot live. Without money, we cannot purchase the things that we need. Without money, we cannot provide a place to live. We cannot obtain our food or clothes or transportation without money. We need money. And yet, the abundance of money brings with it a bit of danger.

Money can lead us astray. Those with lots of money can easily come to trust in gold rather than in God. We can find their fulfillment in fun, rather than in God's faithfulness. And many have fallen down that path. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

It make sense, then, why the prayer in Proverbs 30 says this, ...

Proverbs 30:8-9

Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is my portion,
That I not be full and deny You and say, 'who is the LORD?'
Or that I not be in want and steal,
And profane the name of my God.

What a great prayer to pray. It acknowledges the need for money, which may tempt one to steal. It acknowledges the danger of having much money, which may tempt to forsake the LORD. "Feed me with the food that is my portion." Notice the call here in verse 5 is to be free "from the love of money." That is, free from a desire to have.

This is where the Bible is so good for our souls, because it gets deep into our hearts. It addresses our desires. We are called to be "free from the love of money." You can love money but have little of it. You can love money and have lots of it. Likewise, you can have lots of money, but not love it. And you can have little money, and not love it either. The key isn't whether or not you have money. The key is whether or not your money has you.

So, how do you know if you have a love for money? Listen to your conversations. Your character comes out in your conversations. Is money the primary topic of your talk? Are you always seeking how to have more? Are you always talking about the things you have? Think about your worries and anxieties. Are you worried about your bills? Are you anxious toward the end of the month? Think about your dreams. Do they center around possessions and stuff? Or, do they center around relationships and the kingdom of God? The answers to these sorts of questions will reveal the longings of your heart.

The way to prevent a love of money in your heart comes in the second phrase of verse 5: Don't love money. But, secondly, **Be content with what you have**. Whether you have much, or whether you have little, be satisfied with what you have.

A business man was asked, "How much money do you need?" His answer? "Just one more dollar." That man will never been content. The apostle Paul was a great example of this. In Philippians 4:11-12, he says, ...

Philippians 4:11-12

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Paul was content in prosperity. Paul was content in little. He knew what it was like to be filled. He knew what it was like to go hungry. He knew what abundance was like. He knew what suffering need was like. In all of it, he was content. He was satisfied.

How do you do that? By trusting in the power of Christ, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

I don't know your circumstance, whether you are in abundance or whether you are suffering need. But, I do know that Jesus Christ can enable you to be content in your circumstances. So, trust Him! Confess your sins to Him. Seek mercy from Him.

Now, again, like in marriage, our society is screaming against this. We are a society of mal-contents. You say, "Steve, how do you know?" I know because of the massive debt problem that we have in the United States. The debt that we are carrying is mind-boggling. Our debt is currently at \$14.5 trillion dollars. To bring it home to reality, that's \$46,000 per citizen of the United States. That's \$129,000 per taxpayer in the United States. [\[5\]](#)

I'm not going to comment on the future of what that means. It's complex, and only God knows how it's going to work out fully. I'm only stating the obvious. We as a nation are not content with what we have. We want it now, and so we are willing to purchase now and pay later. That's what debt is. We have purchased \$14.5 trillion dollars of service for today, that we plan on paying tomorrow.

And the government is a reflection of the people. That's the essence of our government. We elect our leaders, and they represent our desires in Washington. They represent our values.

The average household in America is carrying \$7,500 in credit card debt. [\[6\]](#) Hear me on this: this is a sign that we are not content with what we have. But, there is a way out of it -- trusting in the Lord.

Let's turn back to Hebrews to see our third observation from the text, **Trust in the Lord**. In verses 5 and 6, we have two quotes from the Old Testament. They tell us how to be content.

Hebrews 13:5-6

He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The LORD is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

The first quote comes from the early parts of the book of Joshua, when he took over the leadership of Israel from Moses. He had plenty to fear. He was leading a few million people in the wilderness, who were often rebellious and resistant. His task was to take the land of Palestine, a formidable task.

And the LORD said, "Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ... Be strong and courageous! Do not

tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:5, 9). And this was the great assurance that Joshua believed. And God came through.

The writer of the Hebrews is saying: the God of the Old Testament is our God. Just as He didn't fail Joshua when he trusted him, so also will He be there for you if you but trust Him.

And so, be content. God will provide everything for you -- all that you need. Paul promised those in Philippi, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). If you are a follower of Jesus and if you believe that He is better than anything this world has to offer, then trust Him. God isn't going to forsake you. He didn't forsake Moses or Joshua. He won't forsake you.

The second Old Testament quotation comes in verse 6, "So that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" This comes from Psalm 118, verse 6. It comes in the context of the Psalmist thanking the Lord for His saving goodness. He said, "From my distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and set me in a large place" (verse 5).

Later, he concludes, "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes." The same is true of your riches in this life: "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than in the wealth you have."

So, whether you have much or you have little, know that God is on your side. You aren't going to die. You will still have food and clothing. You can be content. Will you trust Him?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 19, 2011 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] www.ahajokes.com/mar001.html

[2] Steve Farrar, Finishing Strong, p 42.

[3] <http://www.divorcerate.org>

[4] http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-12-19-premarital-sex_x.htm

[5] <http://www.usdebtclock.org/>

[6] <http://www.indexcreditcards.com/creditcarddebt/>