



“Worship in Conduct”

Hebrews 13:4-6

Introduction: In the late 17th century, a small Baptist church in Lincolnshire was pastored by a man named Thomas Grantham. Grantham believed it was the Christian’s duty, at home and at church, to demonstrate the love of God and exemplify what true worship really looks like. He often quoted Matthew 5:14-16

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Grantham gathered weekly with his small church unashamed and unconcealed to show the community that they loved God and desired to worship Him. Unfortunately, the 17th century was not so accommodating of individuals who did not agree with the Church of England. Because of Grantham’s view of worship, whether both in public or private venues, persecution would soon follow. Men would come and interrupt the services of this small Baptist church, drag Grantham out of the church and beat him. According to some of the records, he was even stoned. Many possessions and comforts were taken from him and he was falsely accused of breaking the law in order to stir havoc. Eventually the persecution would only increase and place Grantham in jail while fining his faithful followers £20 per month¹ for not attending the Church of England.

As recorded by historian Dr. Tom Nettles, “According to Grantham, Christians ought always to provide a public witness.”² That is our duty. Even if it leads to troubled times, a Christian must remain faithful in his worship and conduct. And that is exactly what the author of Hebrews is calling the believers of the early church to do. They are to stand out as lights in a dark world demonstrating that true worship necessitates a pure and holy conduct. It’s because of the Christian’s desire to be pure, holy, and obedient to the Word of God that the world stands in awe. While all others run about feasting to their heart’s content, seeking to gratify the desires of their lusts and flesh, Christian stands out as billowing tower – strong and unconcealed. Everyone who looks upon it stops for just a moment to consider the mystery of it.³ The man or the woman that says “no” to the lusts of this world, because they have been satisfied with something greater. Something more wonderful.

Well this morning, my desire is to draw our attention to our personal conduct as believers and how we ought to worship God in specifically two ways – marriage and money. God is a consuming fire and He desires His children to offer Him acceptable worship. The writer of Hebrews kindly lays out for us what this “acceptable worship” looks like in the beginning

¹ According to *Historical Currency Conversions*, an online currency calculator, £20 in 1655 would be equivalent to \$4,548.00 in current markets. See <https://futureboy.us/fsp/dollar.fsp?quantity=20¤cy=pounds&fromYear=1655>

² Nettles, Thomas J. *The Baptists Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Volume 1 – Beginnings in Britain). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2005. Pages 72-73

³ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 445 – “We Christians are called to be outrageously pure – to be a source of wonder and even derision to this glandular world.”

of chapter 13. You can see them as if the author was making a list of bullet points. Last week Pastor Timothy covered the first three acts of acceptable worship – brotherly love, hospitality, and empathy for those suffering. This week we will be looking into the worship that every believer ought to display in marriage and money. Please open up with me to Hebrews 13:4-6.

I want to take a moment here to explain that this text we are about to read has been written to God's children. And it may come as a shock to you this morning to know that not all are God's children. And yes, maybe even some of you who are sitting here are not God's children. I ask one thing, please consider the love of Christ and His saving grace that he poured out on the cross. He was what we call "the substitute." Do you know why? Because it should have been me. It should have been you. It should have been all of us. To not only die on a cross but to experience the wrath of God for all eternity in hell. He took that punishment for you if you believe. So I implore this morning, look to Jesus and ask Him for forgiveness for your sins and be freed from the fetters of hell that await you. Become a child of God today.

Let's read our text for this morning.

4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. 5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we can confidently say,

*"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?"*

This text is a short and simple text that continues the list of ways we are to offer acceptable worship to God. So I have divided the sermon into two simple points.

- **Worship in Marriage (v. 4)**
- **Worship with Money (vs. 5-6)**

Worship in Marriage

The command is clear here. Let everyone honor marriage and be sexually pure. Make a note here. The writer of Hebrews is making an important statement here about marriage to put to end an argument that is stirring in the early church. You may not know this because the argument isn't explicit in the text. What's happening is, there are a group of religious leaders who are teaching that marriage is actually not a very pure or holy act.^{4 5} They were teaching that celibacy was actually the purest form for a believer because you weren't practicing intimacy or sex with your spouse. They twisted the whole concept around to say that sex was actually evil because you were gratifying the flesh.⁶ Sure they understood the need to bear children and be fruitful, but they taught their listeners to refrain from enjoying it as much as possible. Well this growing philosophy is of course ridiculous and the writer of Hebrews inserts this small bullet point into the text to give the believers reassurance that you can offer acceptable worship to God, that is god-glorifying and god-honoring, and yes even on the marriage bed.

⁴ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976) p. 94. "Jerome, who at the close of the 4th century preached the beauties of the monastic life, showed his growing antipathy to the married state. He based his strong opinion on the oft-quoted statement of Paul, 'It is better to marry than to burn.' He used to say: 'It is good to marry simply because it is bad to burn.' In like manner Ambrose and Augustine manifested high appreciation for celibacy. Under such influences the praise of celibacy became more insistent and the deeply felt depreciation of marriage more simply and seriously accepted."

⁵ The Biblical Illustrator, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978) p. 598. "Yea, Chrysostom, the celebrated father of the Greek Church, the famous pulpit orator, made a sermon in the dispraise of all women, and tells us that matrimony in its own nature is a sin, only by Divine permission it is excusable." – It may be that Chrysostom changed his view on marriage later in life according to some sources.

⁶ Barnes, Albert. Notes on the New Testament *Explanatory and Practical*: Hebrews. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971. Pgs. 317-318 – "There has been a constant effort made to show that celibacy is a more holy state; that there is something in marriage that renders it *dishonorable* for those who are in the ministry, and for those of either sex who would be eminently pure. This sentiment has been the cause of more corruption in the world than any other single opinion claiming to have a religious sanction."

Let's talk about that. Because there was a wide-spread belief that anything physical in the world was evil, but the spiritual was good. Is that true? Beloved, who created the world? God did. It was His perfect creation that we tainted with sin. The physical realm is not evil. Eve was created for Adam for his enjoyment of her and her enjoyment of him. Pleasure was not something that came only after the fall, but was very much a part of God's glory before it. It is not pleasure itself that is sinful, it is what we do with pleasure that causes us to sin against a holy God.

God designed marriage to be pure and holy. The unity of a man to his bride is a symbol of the unity of Christ and His church. Paul makes that very clear to us in his epistle to the Ephesians.⁷ The husband and the bride are one and that is worshipful. So, worship God in it. Worship God in embracing your spouse with joy and harmony because God said that it was good. The holy and pure act that takes place on the marriage bed is not only worshipful to God, but is the culmination and pinnacle of the unity itself. Therefore, let marriage be held in honor by all because God Himself has instituted it and honored it.⁸

But let us also take caution. Along with the command to honor the marriage, we get a strong warning against defiling it, "for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." Going back to our earlier story of Thomas Grantham. Grantham taught that a Christian should be a public witness in their conduct. Therefore, a believer should practice purity and holiness in every aspect of life. If one claims to be a believer but does not practice purity and holiness, then they are a hypocrite and are damaging the very witness they hope to display.

8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. – 1 John 3:8-10

If the believer is to be a strong tower in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, then let not that tower crumble under the cancer of pleasure that this world offers. According to Kent Hughes, nothing could be more damaging to the church and the gospel witness than the act of sexual immorality that will end up in shipwreck.⁹ Worship God in the purity of the marriage bed. Make war with the passions of lust and flesh that so easily ensnare us.

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. – 1 Peter 2:11-12

Beloved, how are we guarding our minds, our eyes and our hearts to keep the marriage bed undefiled. How are we standing in opposition to the culture of our times as a strong tower whose foundation is God and His Word?¹⁰ We live in

⁷ Ephesians 5:31-32 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

⁸ The MacArthur Study Bible (Revised & Updated Edition), New King James Version. Study Note (Hebrews 13:4) "God highly honors marriage, which He instituted at creation (Gen. 2:24); but some people in the early church considered celibacy to be holier than marriage, an idea Paul strongly denounces in 1 Tim. 4:3. Sexual activity in a marriage is pure, but any sexual activity outside marriage brings one under divine judgment. God prescribes serious consequences for sexual immorality."

⁹ Hughes, R. Kent. Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 447 – "But what does this have to do with the survival of the church? Everything! I can think of no more efficient way to sink that ship that through adultery and sexual immorality. Because such sin is a particularly lethal sin against the church, I have at times prayed this with my ministerial colleagues: 'Lord, if adultery would lie in the future for any of us should we continue to live – then take us home now.' Better dead than damage the church."

¹⁰ New ESV Study Bible (ESV Text Edition:2011), Crossway. Study Note (Hebrews 13:4) "Marriage is to be held in honor, and chastity in marriage is called for, with the warning that God will judge anyone who is sexually immoral or adulterous. This warning is addressed to members of the church, and if they are genuine Christian believers, this judgment of God would not mean final condemnation to hell but would bring disciplinary judgement in this life or loss of reward at the last day, or both. However, in light of the earlier passages (3:12-14; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:14-17), it is possible that such sexual immorality will be an indication that the person committing it is in fact not a true believer and not born again."

a culture where it is acceptable to be on pornography (yes, even within the church), it is socially polite to flirt with the opposite sex, and it is only a minor offense to sleep with your neighbor's spouse. To a culture who flaunts sexuality, they will try to compel you give in to your flesh because that is what feels best. Beloved, let not the marriage bed be defiled.¹¹

If some of you are sitting here this morning and struggling with this battle for purity, know that you are not alone. There are people right here who you can talk to in confidentiality and know that they will be praying for you. Many times, we're waiting for God's hand to come down and strike us so that we can be rid of these sinful desires and temptations, all the while God has already given you the antidote – they're sitting across the pew from you. It is not such a great wrong that you have been tainted with sin, everyone has! But what the problem really is is that you have done nothing about it. You think you can make it on your own. That's a shipwreck. You might say, "No one understands. They'll think of me differently. I'm a monster." Stop with the self-pity. Christ understands. You'd be a fool to think that you have kept your secret life hidden from Him. "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

I cannot end this point regarding worship in marriage without saying this. When we are called to honor the marriage, and keep the bed undefiled, it goes beyond just being sexually pure. This command calls us to a life of service, self-sacrifice and pouring out for the benefit of our spouses. How we treat them. How we talk to them. How we think of them. And how we pray for them. Beloved, do you honor the marriage? Then please tell me you are making an effort to pray for your spouse daily.

Many of you know Ed. He has come in the past to our Sunday evening services. He can't hear very well, so you may remember by his prayers. He can be across the room praying and you could hear is every word as he raised his voice louder and louder. About two years ago during our Sunday evening prayer series, I asked Ed how he was doing. And he replied, "Oh fine, fine." He said, "My wife and I used to pray together. Well she passed away this past December." I said, "Ed, I am so sorry to hear that." He replied, "But do you know what I wish..." He paused, and I said, "What do you wish for Ed?" He said, "I sure wish I could pray with her one more time."

Yet here I am with my wife beside me. I go to bed with my wife every night and I get up with her every morning. We share the same dinner table and living room together. We spend large amounts of time together, yet I neglect take adequate time to pray with my wife. It's because I think that I have all this other important stuff to do. I need to answer emails. I need to look over finances. I need to go to work. We need to do the laundry. We need to put the kids to bed. But we're missing it. We're missing what truly matters in life. If your spouse is not a believer, then I implore to pray double time for their salvation. Grab other brothers and sisters in Christ to pray with you for your spouse's soul. If your spouse is a believer, then your marriage has profound effects that will echo throughout all eternity. God has given you a spouse to sanctify you, to help you, to encourage you, to exhort you, to hold you accountable, and to point you to a living God. No one else should be as instrumental in your sanctification, and when you are in glory, you will remember how God used your spouse to grow you closer to Him. Beloved, honor the marriage and keep it holy.

Worship with Money

"Keep your life free from love of money." I really like how the ESV translation puts this. To be free as opposed to not being free. What do we call someone who is not free? A slave. In other words, the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Don't be a slave." Well... yeah. I don't think any one of us in here wants to be a slave. We don't want fetters and chains. We don't want to be told when we can go outside and when we can't. We don't want a curfew. But you see, the work of the great deceiver has tricked us into thinking that we will find deliverance in things other than God. When you and I place our identity, trust, deliverance, and passion in something that is not God, we have become slaves to the object we now worship. Only One is worthy of our identity, trust, deliverance and passion and that is God Himself. Anything else is an idol that we have created – and it will fail us. It will lead us to the grave.

¹¹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 445 – "Christian sexual morality was unique in the pagan world and a source of wonder. And it has become increasingly so today in a world that considers adultery irrelevant, purity abnormal, and sex a 'right' (however and with whomever one may get it) and that has invented the egregious term 'recreational sex.'"

That's what the writer of Hebrews is challenging us with. Don't bow down and worship money. That is idolatry and is a direct violation to the first and second commandments – Have no other gods before me, Make for yourself no idols. This is difficult I think for all of us. Whether you are wealthy or you are poor, where is your heart? And I don't think it's necessarily because our church has an insatiable desire of fancy cars, homes and glamor. Here's the point, it's not money itself that's the problem. Like our previous point, it's not sex that is the problem. Because within the boundaries that God has made for these two things, they are worshipful to Him. The problem comes with our lust after them and our ill-intent to use them for our satisfaction instead of His. So, the challenge here is to not put our trust or security in money, even though money itself can bring us earthly deliverance and confidence. It is a challenge that we must walk in faith. A challenge that should cause us to place our trust and security in the Lord, whether we have money or not. This is acceptable worship to the Lord.

11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. – Philippians 4:11-14

17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. – 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Instead of putting our trust and security in money, we are to be content with what we have. Everything we have in our possession is a gift from above. So in reality, we really don't have. We are just stewarding what God has placed in our care. Our finances, our homes, our possessions and yes even our families are God's to do with as He pleases. How are you caring for them and investing in them for His glory? A main cross reference in our Bibles that must be addressed with this idea of contentment is 1 Timothy 3:6-10.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Here, Paul resonates with the author of Hebrews by encouraging believers to not be in want for more riches, but instead to find contentment in the Lord. The Giver of all. If we were created to live for God and worship Him, then in Him *only* will we find our complete satisfaction.

You might be thinking right now, "Right, but how do I do that?" Well, the answer comes in one of the most commonly referenced passages of Scripture. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Both John McArthur¹² and Matthew Henry¹³ make it quite clear in their commentary that the actual Greek phraseology has 5 strong affirmations to the negative. "'I will never, no, never leave you, nor ever forsake you.'" We can find our ultimate security, deliverance, trust and refuge in the most power being in the universe

Who has promised to be by our side and help us.¹⁴ Because of Christ and His shed blood on the cross, God now looks down upon His children with delight and rescues them. Listen to the Psalmist as he praises God for rescuing the righteous.

¹² The MacArthur Study Bible (Revised & Updated Edition), New King James Version. Study Note (Hebrews 13:5) "Believers can be content in every situation because of this promise. Five negatives are utilized in this statement to emphasize the impossibility of Christ deserting believers. It is like saying, 'there is absolutely no way whatsoever that I will ever, ever leave you.'"

¹³ Matthew Henry's Commentary *Acts to Revelation*, Volume VI, (MacDonald Publishing Company, Mclean, VA). P. 962 – "Here are no fewer than five negatives heaped together, to confirm the promise; the true believer shall have the gracious presence of God with him in life, at death, and forever. This promise contains the sum and substance of all the promises."

¹⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 450 – "Those who always want more will turn away from God when their Christianity brings material subtraction rather than addition. On the other hand, those who are content – who have found their ultimate treasure in the unflagging presence and care of God – will sail on!"

*14 "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
15 When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
16 With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."
Psalm 91:14-16*

This is true of us because we are now found in Christ Jesus. God has told the saints throughout the ages that He would be with them. So then, our response should be one of a fearless warrior hidden behind the leader of the Lord's army, dressed in His righteousness, and wielding His power. What can man do to us?¹⁵ For we are his treasure possession. Therefore, worship God by treasuring Him and finding contentment in Him. He is worthy of all our praise and honor. And He will satisfy your soul beyond any earthly treasure. The Psalmist believed this when he wrote

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. – Psalm 23*

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16:11*

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. – Luke 12:32-34

¹⁵ Barnes, Albert. Notes on the New Testament *Explanatory and Practical*: Hebrews. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971. Pg. 318 – "The sentiment is beautiful, and full of consolation. What can we fear if we have the assurance that the Lord is on our side, and that he will help us? Man can do no more to us than God permits, and of course no more than will be for our own good; and under whatever trials we may be placed, we need be under no painful apprehensions, for God will be our protector and our friend."

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