

“An Anchor for the Soul: God, Sex, and Money”

Hebrews 12:29-13:6

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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There are some topics that seem to get people really worked up. So they say that in polite conversation you should avoid talking about religion, politics, sex, or money. And as I promised last week, today that’s what we’re going to talk about. Because these can be hot-button issues, before we actually talk about them I just want to suggest some ground rules. First, one of the great things historically about being Presbyterian is that reasonable people can disagree. You may not agree with everything I say and that’s OK. Second, if we disagree about some of these issues, we need to keep coming back to the Bible as the source of our understanding, not our personal opinions. Third, whenever we talk about what the Bible requires of you, it’s about YOU and not someone else. You are the only person you can change so you cannot use this to coerce other people – like your spouse. Let God speak to *each of us* directly.

Last Sunday we spent some time looking at Hebrews 12:29 which says, “our God is a consuming fire,” and discovered that fire has the power to destroy but it also has the power to purify. For followers of Jesus I think that’s the more helpful image. God wants to consume your thoughts and your actions and especially your relationships. As we saw last week, that includes our relationships with people *in* the church and it also includes relationships with people *outside* the church – strangers. Verse 3 points us to our responsibility especially to those who are on the margins – those in prison and those who are mistreated. We are called to be like Jesus and stand with them.

Today we look at the impact of our faith in Christ on even more personal relationships – our relationship with our spouse and our relationship with our own self. What the writer of Hebrews wants us to see is that all of your relationships reflect your relationship with God. In other words, each of these relationships

are ways that we “worship with reverence and awe.”

The first thing I want to talk about is money. Verse 5 says, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.” It sounds simple but you and I know that it’s not. We live in a culture that encourages us to get and spend more and more money. The desire for *more* seems so natural. Maybe that’s why Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. He had lots to say about our relationship with money because that’s one of the areas of life that we can get off track. In Matthew 19, a young man comes to Jesus and asks, “what good deed do I need to do to go to heaven?” Like many of us, this man is trying to earn his way. As we heard in the story he thinks he’s pretty close already. Jesus points him to the Ten Commandments. The young man thinks he’s got this in the bag. But Jesus says something that reveals the man’s heart. His relationship with his money is a problem.

What Jesus shows him is that he is only keeping nine of the ten. The first commandment is, “you shall have no other gods before me.” The man’s love of his money was greater than his love of God. When the man went away sad, Jesus explained to his disciples that it’s hard for wealthy people to get to heaven. Not impossible, but hard. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6: “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.”

Notice that he’s not saying money is bad. What matters, though, is your attitude toward money. It’s a heart issue. Hebrews 13:5 says, “be content with what you have.” What about you? How do you view money? Do you say, “I worked hard for it. It’s my money and I’ll do what I want with it” or do you say, “this is God’s money and I am the manager. How does God want me to use these gifts?” Do you feel you have enough or are you wanting more?

God has instituted a practice to train you in contentment. It's tithing. Most of you know that tithe literally means "a tenth." God required of the Israelites a tenth of what they produced, in their case it was crops and livestock. He expects the same from us. But it's not just a tenth or portion. It's the *first* portion. Tithing is really God's way of testing you. He's saying, "Do you trust me?" When you tithe you are showing God that you trust his promise when He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." This morning I want to challenge you to have a long conversation with God about this area of your life.

The other area of relationships that we want to look at today is marriage and sexuality. Verse 4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." This verse explicitly connects sex and marriage and worship. The original Greek is even stronger than the English translation and it's clear that God's design for sexuality is between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage, which always includes God. That's clearly not the idea that our culture or even now our government holds.

So the first question we need to ask is "what is marriage?" I think many people today, including the Supreme Court, would argue that marriage is instituted by the government and historically the church has participated in it. In this way of thinking marriage becomes a "right" and the question then is "who is entitled to this right?" The first thing I want you to see is that marriage is God's idea. This is all through the Bible. In Genesis 2:18, God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a mate that is perfect for him." So God took part of the man and formed the woman. What we see is that apart from one another each of them is incomplete. Adam recognizes this immediately. When God brings Eve to him, he says, "Wow. This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Then it says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one

flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." Right there in the beginning sexuality and marriage were tied together.

Second, not only is marriage God's idea, but throughout the Bible we find that God takes marriage seriously. In the Ten Commandments, the command against adultery is listed second in the list of "you shall not," behind only murder. God considers adultery more serious than stealing. The Old Testament penalty for adultery was stoning.

The third thing we need to understand about marriage is that God has a *purpose* for marriage. It turns out that your marriage is not just about you. Marriage is not primarily about who you are allowed to love. Let's look at marriage in Ephesians 5. Verse 22 says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord." Some people don't like that verse. I can't imagine why. But stick with me for a moment. This verse is primarily calling for self-sacrifice. It's saying, wives, give up some of your "rights." None of us likes to do that. It's hard. What does that even look like? The next two verses tell us. It looks like the church submitting to Christ. It's harder than we thought.

But what about husbands? Verse 25 says, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." What does that sound like to you? Self-sacrifice. Jesus died on the cross for his church. Husbands should sacrifice like that for their wives. The key to a healthy, successful marriage is right here. It's both people willing to sacrifice their own rights completely for the other's needs.

One of the key areas this takes place is sex. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come

together again, so that Satan may not tempt you.” It’s no surprise that this is one of the areas that often derails marriages. Keeping the marriage bed undefiled means avoiding adultery and sexual immorality. But it also means having a healthy sexual relationship of mutual self-sacrifice within the marriage.

Back to Ephesians 5. Verse 31 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Sounds familiar. Marriage is about joining two complimentary halves into a whole. Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that the whole, the union of male and female, is the image of God.

So what *is* God’s design for marriage? Ephesians 5:32 goes on, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” God instituted marriage for the ordering of families and society but even more importantly He intends marriage to show the world how much Christ loves His church! That’s a huge responsibility. Every person who marries has a responsibility, for the rest of their life, to show the world the union of Christ with His bride, the church. How dare we trivialize marriage by making it about our own desires. Sex and marriage are ultimately about worship with reverence and awe. They are important areas of our life that should be consumed by God.

Amen