Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Our text is **part of the closing applications in the Book of Hebrews**. For a variety of reasons, the Christians that Hebrews was originally were no longer interested in living for Christ. So, Hebrews is full of gentle encouragements to persevere in Christian living and pointed warnings about the dangers of not doing so. And so, having provided Christians with the long list of Old Testament believers, who persevered, despite only having ceremonies and promises, in chapter 11, and having called on New Testament believers to look to Jesus Christ and persevere, and warning them of the eternal consequences of not doing so, in chapter 12, the author ends the letter with a description of some of the behaviours and attitudes that Christians must cultivate. And as with every single New Testament passage that describes the Christian life, a prominent topic is marriage and sex.

* **Tim Keller** was once asked why the Bible gives so much attention, positively and negatively, to sex. He replied that it’s because sex is the most delightful and the most dangerous of all human capacities. He likened sex to fire, for fire can warm and purify and cook food. But if not handled with care it can also burn, infect, scar, and destroy.
* And in Pastor Kevin De Young’s commentary on the Ten Commandments, he described research he did into **Scottish Presbyterianism in the 18th century**. And this required him to read session minutes covering decades. And another author studied session minutes from **John** **Calvin’s church in the 16th century**. And what do you think, by far and away, took up the most time in elders’ pastoral and disciplinary discussions back then? Sexual sin and marriage matters.
* And Pastor Kevin said, “In my fifteen years of pastoral ministry, about 90 percent of the really difficult sin issues that come before the elders have to do with sex and marriage.” And he went on to say, “That’s the way it always has been, and probably the way it always will be. This makes sense, since sex and marriage are two of God’s greatest gifts. No relationship can be so intimate, so sweet, life-giving, and joy-filled as the marital relationship, and no experience can be as intimate and powerful within marriage as sex. So, of course, the devil is going to go after sex and marriage. We should expect confusion, misunderstanding, perversion, and pain – not because sex and marriage are bad or not worth the trouble, but precisely because they are such good gifts.”

So, as part of what the persevering life looks like, we are told: “*Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous*.” And these words are badly needed in our sex-saturated and marriage-warped world. But as we have just seen, they are needed also because sex and marriage issues are in here (church), and in here (heart), for each and every one of us. So, we need to hear God’s design for sex and marriage, because God’s design is good, and so that we might find hope and meaning and forgiveness where it is needed. So, three points as we consider this verse; and the three points are One, Two, and Three. And I will explain as we go along.

1. Our first point is **One**. And what I mean by this is marriage as the wonderful, **one** flesh relationship that God has designed and given to us to enjoy *for His glory*.
   1. And we have discussed marriage quite extensively in our Genesis sermon series, so we can be relatively brief here. But having created the first man, God said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him*.”
      1. And this was before the Fall and sin. Because God is one God in three persons, and because we are made in His image, we need relationships, and the relationship that most closely mirrors who God is is marriage – two people who become one. It is a wonderful mystery.
      2. And furthermore, marriage also reflects the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. So, marriage is noble and meaningful and important. It is not a human or western invention. It is designed by God.
      3. And getting back to Genesis. God didn’t bring an animal to Adam or another male or two or more women; He made one woman, from Adam’s rib. And He brought them together, as husband and wife, saying, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*.” It is one man and one woman, united together as husband and wife, that reflects, most fully, the image of God. And it is only their union that can produce children. And this is why male-male unions and female-female unions are not marriage and never can be. And this is also why, despite making divorce permissible, God hates divorce.
      4. So, this is God’s design for marriage – one man and one woman, becoming one flesh, for life. And it is good! **Proverbs 18:22** says, “*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the LORD*.” And it is meant to be enjoyed! **Proverbs 5:18-19** says, “*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love*.” And the Song of Solomon is one long love poem celebrating marriage and sex.
   2. So, with that in view: If you want God’s design for marriage and sex; meaning the best and most satisfying and most healthy and safe and wise and fulfilling, then don’t have sex before marriage, marry someone of the opposite sex, marry in the Lord, marry younger rather than older, enjoy sex only with your spouse, and stay married (repeat).
      1. Now, already, you might have questions, and maybe even reasons to feel guilty. And we simply don’t have time today to ask and answer every question or speak to every situation. But we can talk afterwards or during the week. And we will speak about sex and marriage guilt later.
      2. But look again at our text: “*Let marriage be held in honour among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled*.” This is God’s good way. This is God’s good message. This is God’s good gift. And we need to hear His way, clearly, in our anti-marriage world.
      3. And in regard to what I said about marrying younger rather than older, young people, please don’t put marriage off until your late 20s or 30s. Here is **Proverbs 5:18-19** again: “*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth*.” And this is not to suggest that getting married young is easy and a guarantee of happiness. Not at all. And if the Lord does not bring you to a godly man or woman to marry until you are older, that is fine! But don’t fall for the world’s message that you shouldn’t even think about marrying until you are much older and have a career established and have travelled and ‘played the field.’ That is disinformation that is not in accord with God’s word.
   3. Now, before we move on to more application, look down at **verse 15**, which is where the author of Hebrews sums up the things he has said about the persevering Christian life, including this commandment about marriage; he says, “*Through Him [meaning the Lord Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name*.” And hopefully these words remind you of **Romans 12:1**: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*.” How we do marriage and view marriage, then, as well as sexual purity as a single person, is about ***worship***. I am, we are, a part of the beloved bride that Christ has purchased with His precious blood. He loves us. He gave Himself up for us, to make us holy and clean, and to present us to Himself at the end of time without a spot or wrinkle. So, we are not talking today about a list of dos and don’ts; we are talking about being so thankful to God for His many mercies to us in Christ that we are eager to offer our bodies (and minds) to Him, whether married or unmarried, as a living sacrifice.
2. So, that brings us next to our second point – **Two**. And what is in view here is the **two types of people that are warned of judgment** in our text – “*the sexually immoral and adulterous*.”
   1. And the two types of people described here are unmarried persons who have sex *before* marriage – the sexually immoral, and married persons who have sex *outside* of marriage – adulterous. But a study of the two Greek words used here, and their cognates, as well as similar passages in Scripture, make it plain that what is in view is **any sexual sin forbidden by God’s law**. So, we are talking about sex before marriage, masturbation, homosexuality, bestiality, paedophilia, incest, prostitution, adultery, polyamorous relationships, being unchaste or immodest, and today, we must very deliberately mention and include viewing pornography. Now, our world says, as does, sadly, many in the wider church, Come on, this is 2023! We are meant to be happy, so if it makes us happy, where is the harm? My bedroom is my business. Love is love! No one is hurt. And we all live in a sex-saturated world, which means we can easily become blasé and unconcerned by sexual sin. So, for these reasons I am going to read the passages of the New Testament that warn against sexual sin. We need to hear them:
      1. In **Matthew 15:19-20**, Jesus said, “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts … adultery, sexual immorality … These are what defile a person*.”
      2. **Romans 13:13**: “*Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies … not in sexual immorality and sensuality*.”
      3. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**: “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral … nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality … will inherit the kingdom of God*.”
      4. **1 Corinthians 6:18**: “*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body*.”
      5. **1 Corinthians 10:8**: “*We must not indulge in sexual immorality*.”
      6. **Ephesians 5:3**: “*But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints*.”
      7. **Colossians 3:5-6**: “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming*.”
      8. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-7**: “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness*.”
      9. **1 Timothy 1:8-10**: “*Now we know that the law is … laid down for the … lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for … the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality … and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine*.”
      10. **Galatians 5:19-21**: “*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality …orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*.”
      11. And finally, in **Revelation 21:8**, in contrast to the description of the saints in heaven, we read: “*But as for the … sexually immoral … their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death*.”

So, do you think God has stopped being concerned with sexual sin? Absolutely not! He is against it, in all its forms, and it is deadly serious. We offend Him with these sins, and we hurt others and we hurt ourselves.

* 1. And just in case you heard that list and were tempted to think that it is others who need to confess and repent of sexual sin, let me now read to you Jesus’ words from **Matthew 5:27-28**: “*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart*.”
     1. The World Health Organization recently announced that COVID is no longer a pandemic, which means a world-wide illness. But there is a pandemic that is only getting worse, and that is **pornography**. The statistics are awful. And I am not talking about out in the world.
     2. And even if you are one of the few who does not view pornography, maybe its raunchy literature or Christian Amish romance novels or the fantasies in your mind or lustful looks and thoughts over images or people that you see.
     3. But this puts every single one of us in the cross hairs of the seventh commandment, doesn’t it. Not one of us is good when it comes to keeping the seventh commandment.
     4. Therefore, says the Lord, “*Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous*.”

1. And that brings us to our third point – **THREE**. And what is in view here is words for three types of people – **the tempted, the wayward, and the brokenhearted**. And I have borrowed this point straight out of pastor Kevin De Young’s treatment of the seventh commandment in his book on the Ten Commandments.
   1. So, first of all, words for **the** **tempted**. It maybe that temptation to engage in some sort of sexual sin is pressing in on you now, or perhaps it will come tomorrow. If so, please listen to the Lord:
      1. Earlier in **Proverbs 5:3-5** we read, “*For the lips of a forbidden woman [or man] drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol*.” Sexual sin may bring a moment of physical pleasure, but that will soon be followed by guilt, pain, separation, bitterness, and maybe even death. So, don’t go there. And if you are stuck in ongoing sexual sin, like pornography, please ask for help. It is virtually impossible for anyone to resist that sin by themselves. And be assured, you will receive help.
      2. And there are all sorts of programs and strategies to help people who want to resist sexual sin.And they are useful, and they have their place.But ultimately, as a believer, you have Christ and His Spirit. **Hebrews 4:15-16** says, “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*.” And here is God’s promise to you from **1 Corinthians 10:13**: “*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*.”
      3. And to those of you who are single, who hear sex-sex-sex, all the time, and everywhere, and who may be wondering, I can’t wait one more year or two more years … listen to **Lamentations 3:25-27**: “*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*.” And I know that this passage is not about waiting for a spouse, but a spouse is a gift from God. And if He provides you with a spouse, it will be in His good time. And if you wait for Him and His provision, He will provide you with sufficient grace for the next sex-less day, and the one after…
      4. And to you who are married, sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed and explored. And it is also for fighting sexual temptation. So, have sex, regularly.
   2. And now words for **the** **wayward**. A few moments ago, we read the passages of the New Testament that warn about judgment on the sexually immoral. But so that we are clear, God is not saying that if you commit any one of these sins, ever, then you will burn in hell. The people in view are the people who 1 John 3 describes as those who “***make a practice of sinning***.” And we all know what practicing means – doing something over and over and over again. So, anyone of us may experience the *consequences* of sexual sin, but those who come under judgment for sexual sin are those who commit it repeatedly and without repentance.
      1. Could this be you, my friend? Could it be that you are here each Sunday, twice, but you are practicing sexual sin? If so, listen to what John says: “*Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil … 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*.” You must repent and trust in Christ or you will come under judgment. Confess your sin/s and resolve, by God’s grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the support of your brothers and sisters, if need be, to resist sin.
   3. But I hasten on, thirdly and finally, to words for **the broken-hearted**. For there will be those among us today who are feeling absolutely crushed and convicted by all that has been said about sexual sin. Maybe it is sexual sin from far in your past that still cuts deeply, or maybe it is sexual sin from more recent times or even today, but you hate it, and you hate this habit, and maybe you even hate yourself. Well, God has words for you also:
      1. **1 John 1:8-9** says, “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”
         1. And He can do this because He took all the sins of believers and put them on Jesus Christ when He was on the cross. And that includes all your sexual sins. And He punished Jesus, so that He could show you His love and mercy and kindness. And we know that Jesus paid the price because He said, “*It is finished*.” He took the sin and the guilt and the shame, so that when the Father looks at you, He sees purity and spotlessness and clean.
      2. And Jesus is standing before you today, saying, “*Come to me, all who [carry a burden of sexual sin and guilt and shame] and I will give you rest*.”
      3. And specifically in regard to sexual sins, earlier I quoted from **1 Cor. 6:9-10**, “*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral … nor adulterers … nor men who practice homosexuality … will inherit the kingdom of God*.” And Paul wrote those words to the members of the church in Corinth. But listen to what he said next: “*And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God*.” Through confession of sin and repentance and faith, there is a fresh beginning for the sexually broken-hearted. And a verse of the Bible that has been a tremendous blessing to those with a sordid sexual history is **Revelation 21:5**, where Jesus says, “*Behold, I am making all things new*.” And I know that is in reference to the new heavens and new earth, but with Christ there can be fresh beginnings, a clean slate, an opportunity to pursue purity, regardless of your sexual past.
      4. Please go to Christ in confession and repentance and find rest and renewal in Him!

Brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, “*Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous*.” Words of warning that are badly needed today? Yes. But also words of truth and joy and hope and renewal through confession and faith in Christ.

May the Lord make us those who worship Him by striving for sexual purity, whether unmarried or married. Amen.