

“DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM”

**I. Introduction**

- A. One thing that comes across loud and clear in the New Testament is that Christian doctrine leads to and informs Christian duty.
1. In much of the letter to the Hebrews the focus is upon various aspects of Christian doctrine.
  2. But as the letter nears its end, the writer shifts his focus to how Christians ought to live in light of the truths that he has expounded.
  3. Hebrews 12 ended by reminding us that we should be grateful to God for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
  4. It told us that we should express our gratitude by worshipping the Lord with reverence and awe.
  5. In other words, the proper way to respond to God’s grace is to strive to keep the first table of the law, which is summed up in the command to love God with all of our being.
- B. The final chapter of Hebrews contains further exhortations about how we ought to live in light of the grace that we have received in Christ.
1. Here the focus is upon the second table of the law, which is summed up in the command to love our neighbors as ourselves.
  2. This chapter helps fill out the picture of what life in Christ’s unshakable kingdom should look like.
  3. As we study the first six verses of this chapter today, we will consider what it teaches us about three aspects of the domestic sphere of life: brotherly love; sexual purity; and contentment.

## II. Brotherly Love

- A. Our passage begins with the exhortation to “Let brotherly love continue.”
1. As you may know, the phrase “brotherly love” translates the Greek word *philadelphia*.
  2. By referring to our love for our fellow Christians as “brotherly love,” the writer reminds us that as Christians we are a part of God’s family.
  3. You cannot be a Christian without being brother or sister to other Christians.
  4. Just as we have an obligation to love the members of our biological family, we also have an obligation to love the members of our spiritual family.
  5. And love is not primarily a matter of sentiment but of how we actually treat people.
  6. It is something that requires work and even a willingness to be inconvenienced.
  7. It is very easy for us to get consumed with our own interests and concerns.
  8. As Calvin puts it, “nothing flows away so easily as love; when everyone thinks of himself more than he ought, he will allow to others less than he ought.”
  9. We need to be intentional about reaching out to other believers and caring for them in tangible ways.
- B. It is interesting that the writer exhorts these believers to let brotherly love “continue.”

1. This indicates that they were already demonstrating love for their fellow believers.
  2. This was a good thing, but they needed to keep on doing it.
  3. The same is true for us.
  4. We should never think that we've already fulfilled our duty to extend care to our fellow Christians.
  5. For as long as we remain in this world, we owe a debt of love to our neighbors — especially to other believers.
- C. After giving the general exhortation about brotherly love, the writer next gives two specific examples of how this love is to be extended.
1. The first has to do with extending hospitality to strangers.
  2. Hospitality was an important part of life in the ancient world.
  3. While there were some inns, they were often places of danger and ill-repute.
  4. If you are familiar with the story *Les Miserables*, the innkeepers in that story give you an idea of why first-century Christians who were traveling on business or for the spread of the gospel would prefer to stay in the homes of other believers.
  5. Hospitality remains an important part of the Christian life today.
  6. We are living in an age in which it is very easy for people to live fairly isolated lives.
  7. As we are able, we should use our homes to provide refreshment and encouragement to others, especially fellow believers.

8. When we regularly do so, we will find that it is sometimes as much of a blessing to us as it is to our guests.
  9. This is the point that the writer is making by speaking of those who unknowingly entertained angels, which is probably a reference to the experiences of Abraham and Lot.
- D. The second example of brotherly love that is mentioned in our text is visiting those who are in prison.
1. In the original context, this would primarily be referring to Christians who were in prison because of their faith.
  2. It would be very tempting for the Hebrew Christians to distance themselves from such people.
  3. By associating with them, they would be putting themselves at risk.
  4. On top of that, there is something within all of us that prefers to stay away from people when they are suffering.
  5. We feel awkward and uncomfortable.
  6. We don't know what to say.
  7. It is depressing.
  8. But our God instructs us to bear the burdens of our fellow believers when they are suffering.
  9. As far as how this command applies to us today, if we know a Christian who is in prison, we certainly should visit him and show compassion to him.
  10. We should also visit those who are shut-in or in nursing homes or in the hospital.

11. This is not a job that is only for ministers.
12. It is something that every Christian can do.
13. This is not always an easy thing to do, but it is an important way of showing brotherly love.

### III. Sexual Purity

- A. The second aspect of domestic life that is addressed in our text is marriage.
  1. The writer 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."
  2. Marriage is to be held in honor because it is God's institution.
  3. God created man male and female.
  4. God presented the first bride to the first groom.
  5. God's Word presents that first marriage as the paradigm for every marriage, saying, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Gen. 3:24)
  6. We honor marriage by submitting to the Bible's teaching on marriage.
  7. Despite what our culture says, the Bible tells us that marriage between one man and one woman is the only proper context for sexual intimacy.
  8. The Bible tells us that marriage is for life, though divorce is permitted in cases of adultery or willful abandonment by an unbelieving spouse.

9. The Bible tells us that the prohibition against adultery and sexual immorality extends both to our outward actions and our inward thoughts.
  10. And positively, the Bible tells us that husbands are to love their wives in a self-giving manner that seeks their spiritual edification and that wives are to submit to their husbands in the Lord.
- B. I'm sure that I don't need to tell you that we are living in a culture that dishonors marriage in many ways.
1. No-fault divorce laws have made it easy for marriages to be dissolved for any reason at all.
  2. Sex has been detached from marriage in the public mind, with the result that sex outside of marriage is common.
  3. Unmarried couples often decide to move in with each other.
  4. Many states are changing the definition of marriage so that people of the same sex can get married to each other.
  5. If Christians are going to honor marriage in such a context, it will require that we not follow the lead of our culture in matters of sexual ethics.
- C. Unfortunately, many churches are caving in and adopting the culture's views.
1. A church in San Francisco made headlines recently because of its decision to change its position on homosexuality.
  2. This church, called City Church San Francisco, was planted as a PCA church in 1997 but then joined the liberal Reformed Church in America (RCA) because it wanted to have female church officers.
  3. On March 19, the Senior Pastor sent a letter to the congregation communicating that the church now affirms that homosexual sex is

morally acceptable within the context of marriage.

4. Churches and denominations that make such decisions do so because they want to maintain credibility with the culture.
  5. They don't want to be seen as narrow-minded and exclusive.
  6. They would say that they have taken decided to accept homosexual marriage out of love.
  7. They have made the mistake of thinking that extending love to homosexuals means telling them that their behavior is approved by God.
  8. They wouldn't tell that to a drug addict or a thief.
  9. It is not loving to make people feel good about things that are not good.
  10. As Carl Trueman points out, "Love needs content if it is to be anything more than empty sentiment or an aesthetic." [*Luther on the Christian Life*, 174]
  11. The thing that is most ironic about all of this is that these churches are left with nothing to say to the wider culture.
  12. Because they have allowed the culture rather than God's Word to shape their views, they aren't saying anything that isn't already being said by the culture.
- D. We need to understand that we are now in an era in which Christians are out of sync with the culture when it comes to marriage and sexual ethics.
1. Our views are increasingly looked upon as strange and even morally reprehensible.
  2. This is what worldliness does.

3. As David Wells astutely put it, "Worldliness is what makes sin look normal in any age and righteousness seem odd." [*God in the Wasteland*, 29]
  4. If we are going to honor marriage in this culture, we are going to have to be prepared to be held in disdain by the culture.
- E. We should also note that our text says that God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
1. We find similar statements elsewhere in the New Testament.
  2. The letter of Jude says that "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7)
  3. Ephesians 5 says that "everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Eph. 5:5)
  4. And 1 Corinthians 6 says "neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10)
  5. Of course, these passages are not saying that sexual sins (or any of the sins that are listed) cannot be forgiven.
  6. There is only one unforgivable sin: the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which takes place when a person persistently and finally resists the gospel offer of forgiveness through faith in Christ.
  7. God forgives those who repent, but those who persist in their sin and refuse to turn to Christ for forgiveness will be judged.



8. We need to be on guard against sexual sin, for it is a sin that has caused many to turn away from Christ in pursuit their own lusts.

#### IV. Contentment

- A. The third aspect of domestic life that our text addresses is money.
  1. The writer gives the exhortation to “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have”.
  2. Most people know that it is not good to love money.
  3. Most people know that contentment is a good thing.
  4. The question that confronts us as we go through life is how to cultivate contentment.
  5. This passage answers that question for us.
  6. It tells us that the way to be content is to remember what God has promised in his Word.
  7. The promise that God made to Joshua at the time of the conquest is a promise that God makes to us as well: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”
  8. When we take God at his word, we will be able to join the psalmist in saying, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me.”
- B. When you think about it, it is surprising that the writer of this letter felt that he needed to talk to these people about the danger of loving money.
  1. After all, he commended them back in chapter 10 for how they “joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” (10:34)

2. The fact that the writer exhorts them not to love money tells us that this is an ongoing temptation in the Christian life.
3. Even those who have resisted this temptation in the past need to be aware of the danger that it continues to present to them.
4. If this was the case for these first century Christians, it is even more so for us.
5. We live in an extremely affluent culture.
6. Even those of us who do not think of ourselves as wealthy have much more than most people in the world.
7. We are living in a time and place that in many ways encourages discontentment.
8. Listen to these words from Herbert Schlossberg's book *Idols for Destruction*: "Materialism, coupled with the productivity of machinery and electronics, has brought us to the universal expectation of More, first rising expectations and then rising entitlements. This is what the Bible refers to as covetousness... The biblical outlook on wealth seems odd only because we have adopted as normal a way of life that is hopelessly unable to produce what it promises and has demonstrated that inability to almost everyone." [311]
9. Schlossberg wrote that book about 30 years ago, and the progress of technology in our culture has only made his words ring more true.
10. Materialism is not a new problem, but there are factors that especially exacerbate it in our culture.
11. The thing that we always have to remember is that no amount of money or possessions can ever make a person content.
12. As the writer of Ecclesiastes noted many years ago, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth

with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, the increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?" (Eccl. 5:10-11)

## V. Conclusion

- A. The exhortations that are made in this passage help us to see how very different Christ's unshakable kingdom is from the kingdoms of this world.
- B. As members of Christ's kingdom, we are not islands unto ourselves.
- C. Because God has graciously adopted us into his family, he calls us to love our fellow believers in practical ways, ways that will inconvenience us.
- D. As members of Christ's kingdom, we are not free to do as we please with God's gift of sexuality.
- E. Our Lord calls us to honor marriage and to avoid all of the ways in which sex can be defiled.
- F. As members of Christ's kingdom, we are not to put our trust in the things of this world.
- G. We need to remember that we have an imperishable inheritance laid up for us in heaven.
- H. Brothers and sisters, since we are receiving this unshakable kingdom, let us respond by honoring our God in all of our domestic affairs.